LEGENDS of HOLLYWOOD

KEANU REEVES

STORIES OF HIS MOST ICONIC ROLES:

MATT
RIVER'S EDGE, 1986

TOD HIGGINS
PARENTHOOD, 1989

TED "THEODORE" LOGAN
BILL & TED'S EXCELLENT ADVENTURE, 1989

SCOTT FAVOR
MY OWN PRIVATE IDAHO, 1991

JOHNNY UTAH
POINT BREAK, 1991

JACK TRAVEN
SPEED, 1994

NEO / THOMAS ANDERSON
THE MATRIX, 1999

SHANE FALCO
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JOHN WICK
JOHN WICK, 2014

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KEANU REEVES

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Everything about him screams superstar
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INTRODUCTION

WHY WE LOVE KEANU REEVES

Everything about him screams superstar—except his personality

There are celebrities who are larger than life, with egos to match. Then there are celebrities plagued by self-doubt, ones who spend their careers desperately trying to show everyone that they deserve recognition because they might not believe it themselves.

Keanu Reeves appears to be neither of those things. He is a huge celebrity, one of the most marketable box office stars of his generation, and an actor responsible for a long list of memorable performances. But he's also well-known for showing very little ego and having the demeanor of a regular guy. He comes across on screen and in person as just... a nice guy in Hollywood.

In the end, that is what makes him special. He doesn't seem to know (or flaunt) how big a star he really is, which only makes him bigger.

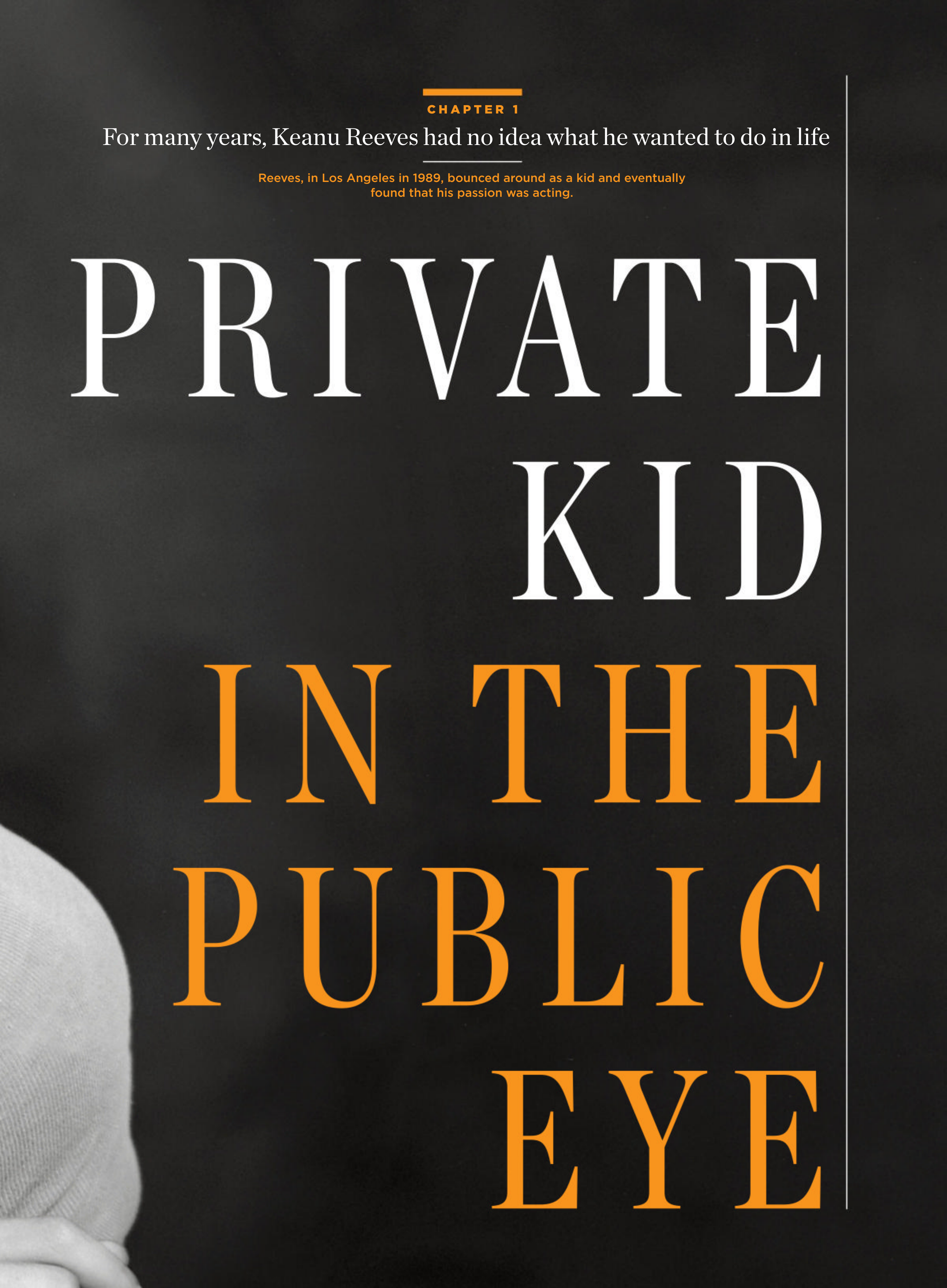
There are countless stories about his kindness, consideration and generosity—extended to co-stars, co-workers and fans. Think about the characters he's played on-screen and how he's played them. Whether it's the goofy Ted "Theodore" Logan III in *Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure*, the heroic cop in *Speed*, the washed-up college quarterback in *The Replacements* or the deified Neo in *The Matrix*. These characters are all different, yet they share one similar trait: They are generally good people, trying to do great things, seemingly unaware (at first) of how special they really are.

Keanu Reeves is the same way. And for a public that tends to worship movie stars, it's exceptionally endearing. For close to 30 years, the world has grown to love his humble nature. People appreciate how Keanu doesn't act like he's better than anyone else—and that so many of his characters behave the same way.

Reeves has yet to play a superhero, but he's played a whole lot of super humans. People tend to be drawn to that. It's why the world is drawn to Keanu Reeves.

CHAPTER 1

For many years, Keanu Reeves had no idea what he wanted to do in life



Reeves, in Los Angeles in 1989, bounced around as a kid and eventually found that his passion was acting.

PRIVATE KID IN THE PUBLIC EYE

CHAPTER 1

K

Keanu Reeves was born in Beirut, Lebanon, the son of British costume designer Patricia Taylor and native Hawaiian geologist Samuel Nowlin Reeves Jr. His family roots extend to China, Ireland and Portugal—and his childhood was not easy.

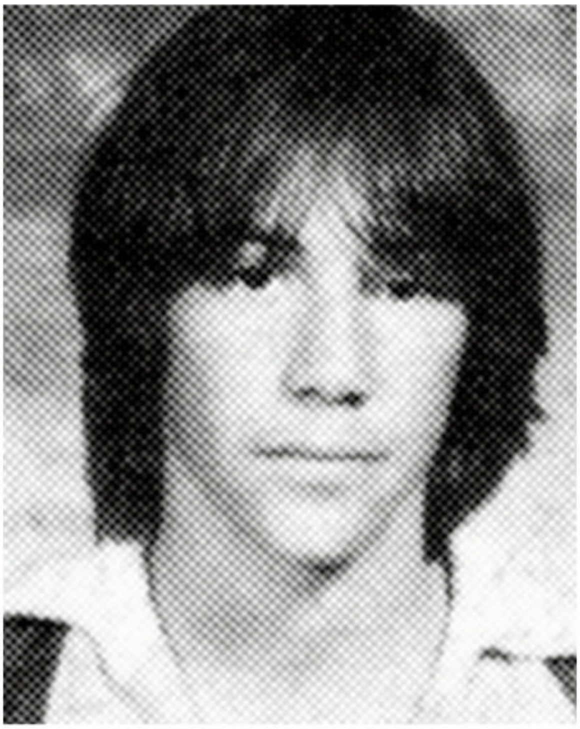
Keanu's parents divorced when he was around 3 years old, and his father would abandon him later in childhood, disappearing for nearly a decade. He moved with his mother to Sydney, Australia, then to New York, and eventually to Toronto after his mother remarried—something she would do several times during his youth.

Toronto became the home that Keanu best remembers, and it's also where he got his first taste of acting, in the ensemble of a summer camp performance of *Damn Yankees*. The stage wasn't exactly love at first sight for Keanu. His childhood was lonely and troubled, and his behavior often reflected it. He bounced around from high school to high school—attending four in all. As a student at De La Salle College, a private school in Toronto, he was a star athlete on the hockey team and was voted MVP. He was so good as a goalie that he was nicknamed "The Wall," and he even considered turning pro or possibly trying out for the Canadian Olympic team.

YOUNG MAN
Reeves, pictured here at 8 years old. After his parents' divorce, Keanu moved with his mother to Sydney, Australia, and New York, before settling in Toronto.

MOST VALUABLE
Keanu Reeves was a star athlete as the goalie for De La Salle College's ice hockey team where he was nicknamed "The Wall."

> "I WAS JUST A LITTLE TOO RAMBUNCTIOUS AND SHOT MY MOUTH OFF ONCE TOO OFTEN."

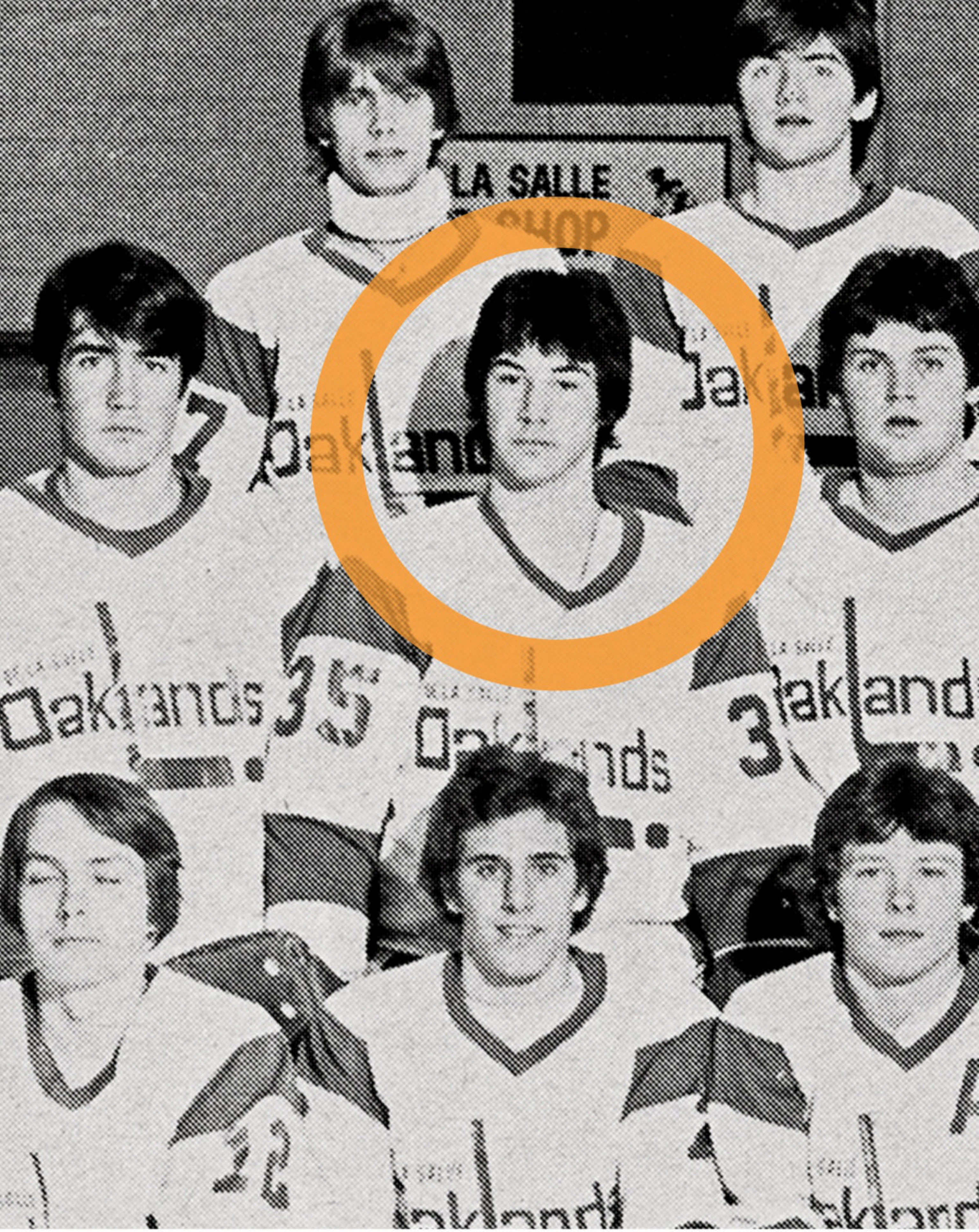


But sports didn't stick, either. A free and unsettled spirit, Keanu couldn't decide on what he wanted. And an impulsive decision led him to change schools and switch passions again.

"One day I was playing basketball in Grade 10 and a friend of mine asked me if I wanted to go audition for the performing arts high school," Reeves said in an interview for the book *The New Breed: Actors Coming of Age*. "I did, and I got in."

He only lasted one year at The Toronto School for the Performing Arts before he was kicked out. "I was greasy and running around a lot," Reeves explained. "I was just a little too rambunctious and shot my mouth off once too often. I was not generally the most well-oiled machine in the school. I was just getting in their way, I guess."

His one year there did renew his passion for acting. So, he enrolled at the Lea Posluns Theatre School so he could pursue the arts as a career. At first it was completely local. He took part in Toronto stage productions, film and television. He thought he wanted to be a Shakespearean actor. Instead, he had roles on Canadian television,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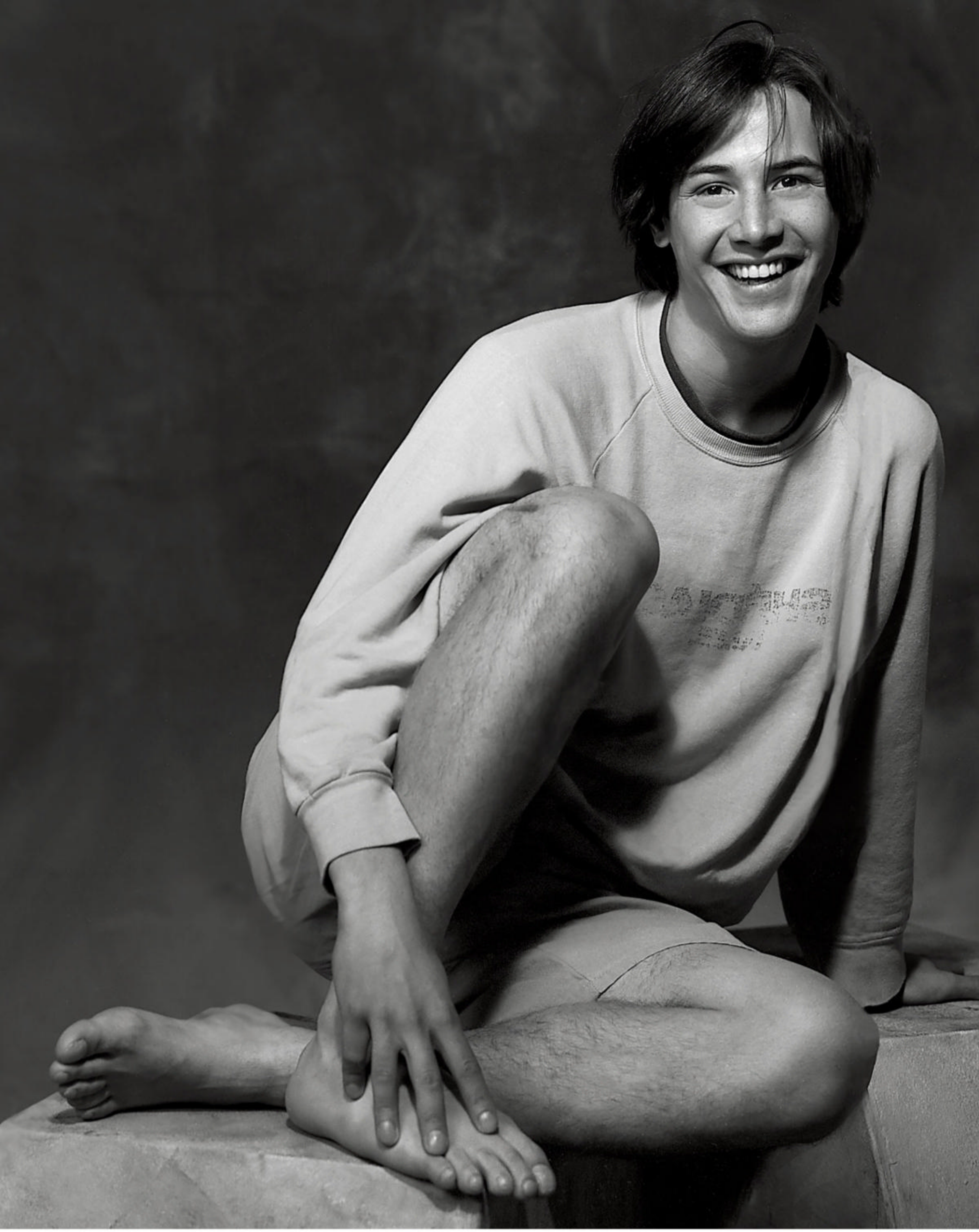


FIRST FEATURE
Thanks to his skills on the ice, Reeves caught his big break in the 1986 film *Youngblood*, a hockey drama starring Rob Lowe and Patrick Swayze.

> “I JUMPED INTO ACTING WITHOUT AN ULTIMATE GOAL.”

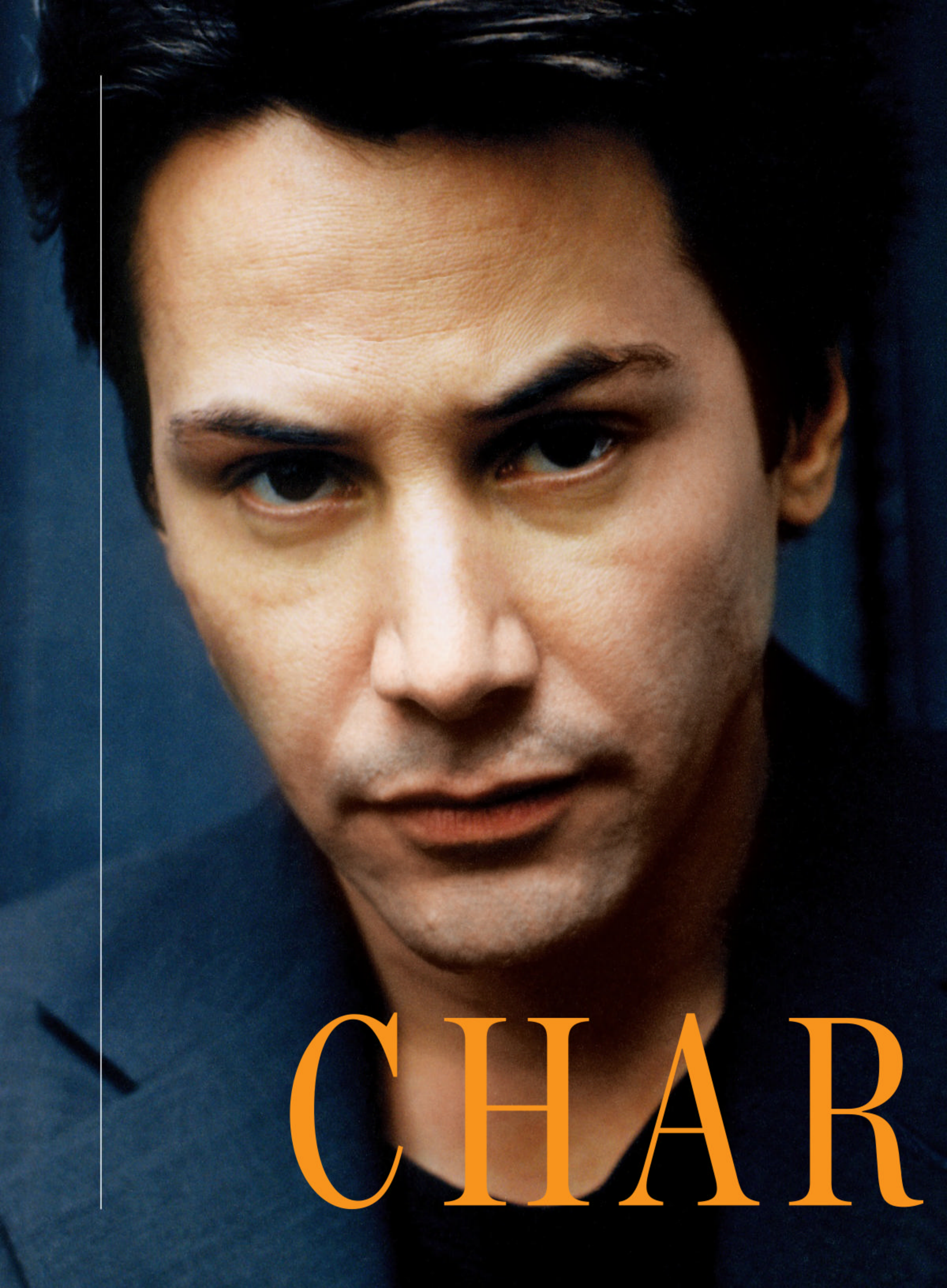
including the CBC show *Hangin’ In*. He also did community theater and landed a Coke commercial. His first professional role of note was in a play called *Wolfboy*, which became a cult hit among Toronto’s LGBTQ community.

Keanu caught a huge break when the Rob Lowe vehicle *Youngblood* came to film in Toronto. It was a story about hockey, which required actors who could play. That was perfect for Keanu, who was cast as “Heaver” in a small, supporting role.

This led Keanu to his first starring role as Matt in the 1986 film *River’s Edge*, a crime drama that premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival and received rave reviews.

From there, his career took off, which was another adjustment for a young man who once described himself to *Rolling Stone* magazine as “a pretty private kid.” Keanu was on his way to a movie career—but that didn’t mean he had a plan. “I jumped into acting without an ultimate goal,” he said in *The New Breed*.

Eventually, the goals came to him—one part at a time.



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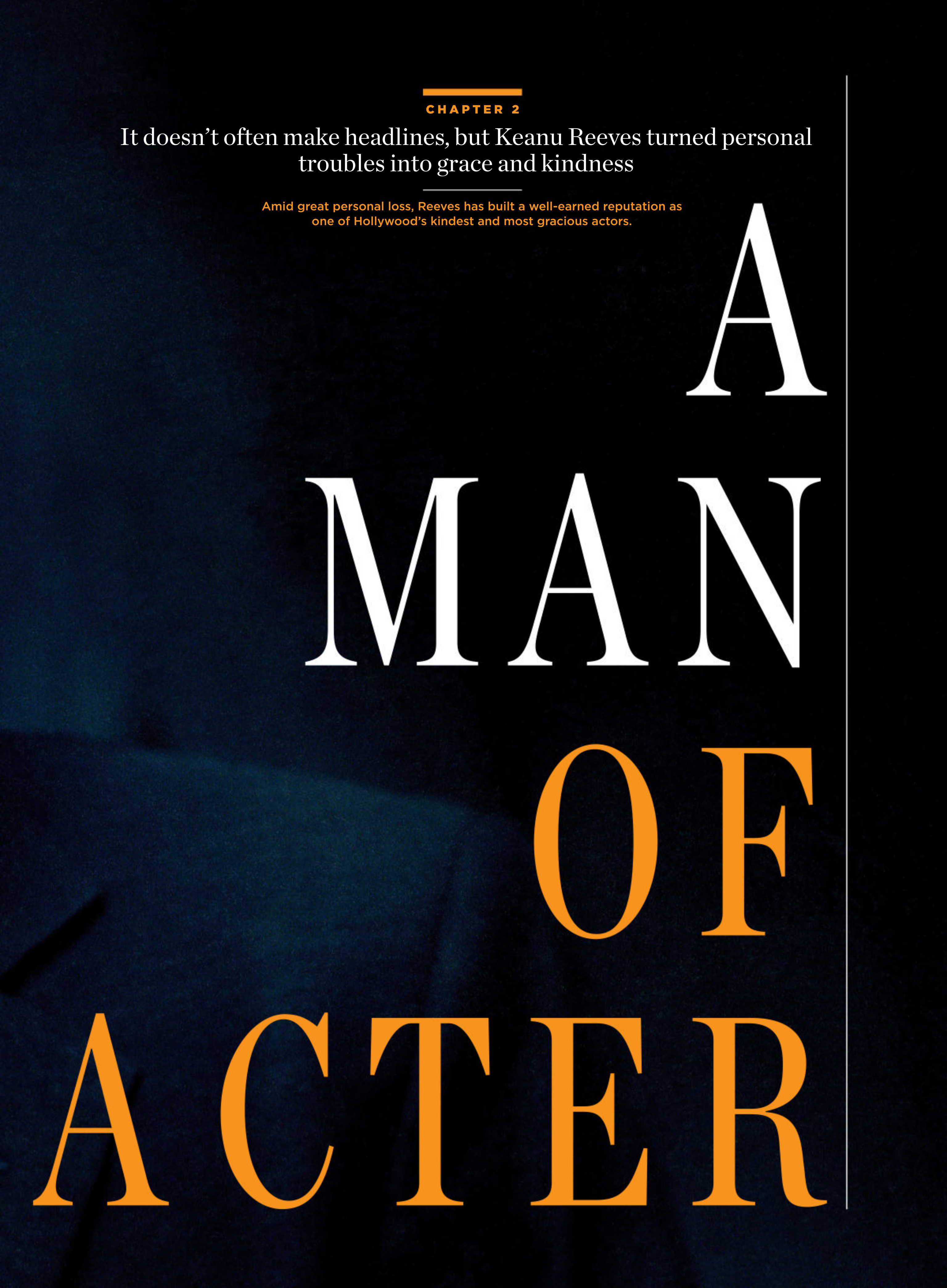

CHAPTER 2

It doesn't often make headlines, but Keanu Reeves turned personal troubles into grace and kindness

Amid great personal loss, Reeves has built a well-earned reputation as one of Hollywood's kindest and most gracious actors.

A
MAN
OF
ACTER

CLOSE FRIENDS
In 1993, Reeves was struck hard by the tragic loss of his close friend and fellow actor, River Phoenix.

CHAPTER 2

Keanu Reeves lived through a rough childhood, and his years as a young adult were not any easier. Behind his easygoing smile, his rocketing career and his nice-guy image is a man who has been touched by tragedy far too often.

His family turmoil, which included a strained relationship with his mother and sister, was difficult enough. Then, in 1993, he was struck hard by the death of his close friend and fellow actor, River Phoenix. The two met on the set of *Parenthood*—River wasn't in that film but Keanu played opposite his kid brother, Joaquin. In 1991, River and Keanu co-starred in the critically acclaimed drama *My Own Private Idaho*. Reeves was filming *Speed* when he learned that on Halloween night 1993, a man he described as one of his closest friends died of a drug overdose.

"I watched how Keanu grieved," *Speed* co-star Sandra Bullock told *Esquire* magazine. "And oh, did he grieve for his friend. He's very private, but he couldn't hide that."

Six years later, Reeves met Jennifer Syme at a party for his alternative rock band, Dogstar. The pair hit it off, and less than a year later, Syme became pregnant with their daughter—Ava Archer Syme-Reeves—who was delivered stillborn on Christmas Eve 1999.

GRATITUDE IN GRIEF
“Grief changes shape, but it never ends,” Reeves told *Parade* magazine.

> “
>
> MUCH OF MY APPRECIATION OF LIFE HAS COME THROUGH LOSS.
>
> ”

The devastated couple separated. And even though they eventually reunited, Syme suffered from postpartum depression. On April 2, 2001, she was killed when the vehicle she was driving crashed into a row of parked cars in Los Angeles. She was reportedly impaired and not wearing a seatbelt.

Reeves was crushed once again.

“Grief changes shape, but it never ends,” he told *Parade* magazine. “People have a misconception that you can deal with it and say, ‘It’s gone, and I’m better.’ They’re wrong.”

What’s most amazing about Reeves is that the turmoil did not leave him bitter or angry—at least not toward the outside world. Instead, he found a way to channel his grief into a feeling of gratitude. “Much of my appreciation of life has come through loss,” he told *Parade*. “Life is precious. It’s worthwhile.”

That philosophy has inspired a list of kind and charitable gestures on both large and small scales. It has helped him build the reputation of being perhaps the nicest man in Hollywood, one who appreciates everyone—from his co-stars, to the crew members on his projects, to his adoring fans.

For example, when filming wrapped on *The Matrix Reloaded,* Keanu showed his appreciation for the unheralded stuntmen—buying each of the 12 that worked with him a Harley-Davidson motorcycle.

“We were all in this thing, and we were training together beforehand,” Reeves told the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*. “I just wanted ... to give a bigger thank you to all these guys who helped me make this, I think, one of the great movie fights in the history of cinema.”

Then there was the time in 2019 when he was on a flight from San Francisco to Los Angeles and the plane was forced to make an emergency landing in Bakersfield, California. Reeves boarded a van with other passengers to finish out the journey, taking pictures with them and telling stories along the way for a memorable trip.

Reeves also runs a private charitable foundation that provides aid to children’s hospitals and cancer research. But unlike the foundations of most celebrities, it doesn’t feature his name.

“I JUST LET THE FOUNDATION DO WHAT IT DOES.”

“I don’t like to attach my name to it,” he told *Ladies Home Journal*. “I just let the foundation do what it does.”

He’s also known for taking pay cuts if it means making a film better. Keanu reportedly lowered his pay for the *Matrix* movies so the studio could spend more on costumes and special effects. He took a large pay cut after he signed on to star in *The Devil’s Advocate* so the studio could afford to bring in Al Pacino. And he did the same in *The Replacements* so Gene Hackman would come and play his head coach.

Bullock told *Esquire* how she told Reeves while they were filming *Speed* that she had never tried Champagne and truffles. A few days later, he brought Champagne, truffles and flowers to her house.

“He’s a listener,” Bullock said. “And it drives. People. Crazy.

“When I first met him, I would spend as much time as I could filling a silence, just to feel comfortable. And the more I jibber-jabbered on, the quieter he would get. And I thought, I don’t understand what’s happening!

“And then a day or two later, he would arrive with a note or a little package, saying, ‘I thought about what you said.’ And he would have his response. How many people do you know like that?”

Not many... But that’s the man that Keanu Reeves decided to become.

RAISING AWARENESS Keanu Reeves reunites with director Bernardo Bertolucci at a charity screening of their 1993 film *Little Buddha*, in 2015.

LEGE RO

MATT
RIVER'S EDGE, 1986

TOD HIGGINS
PARENTHOOD, 1989

TED "THEODORE" LOGAN
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THE REPLACEMENTS,
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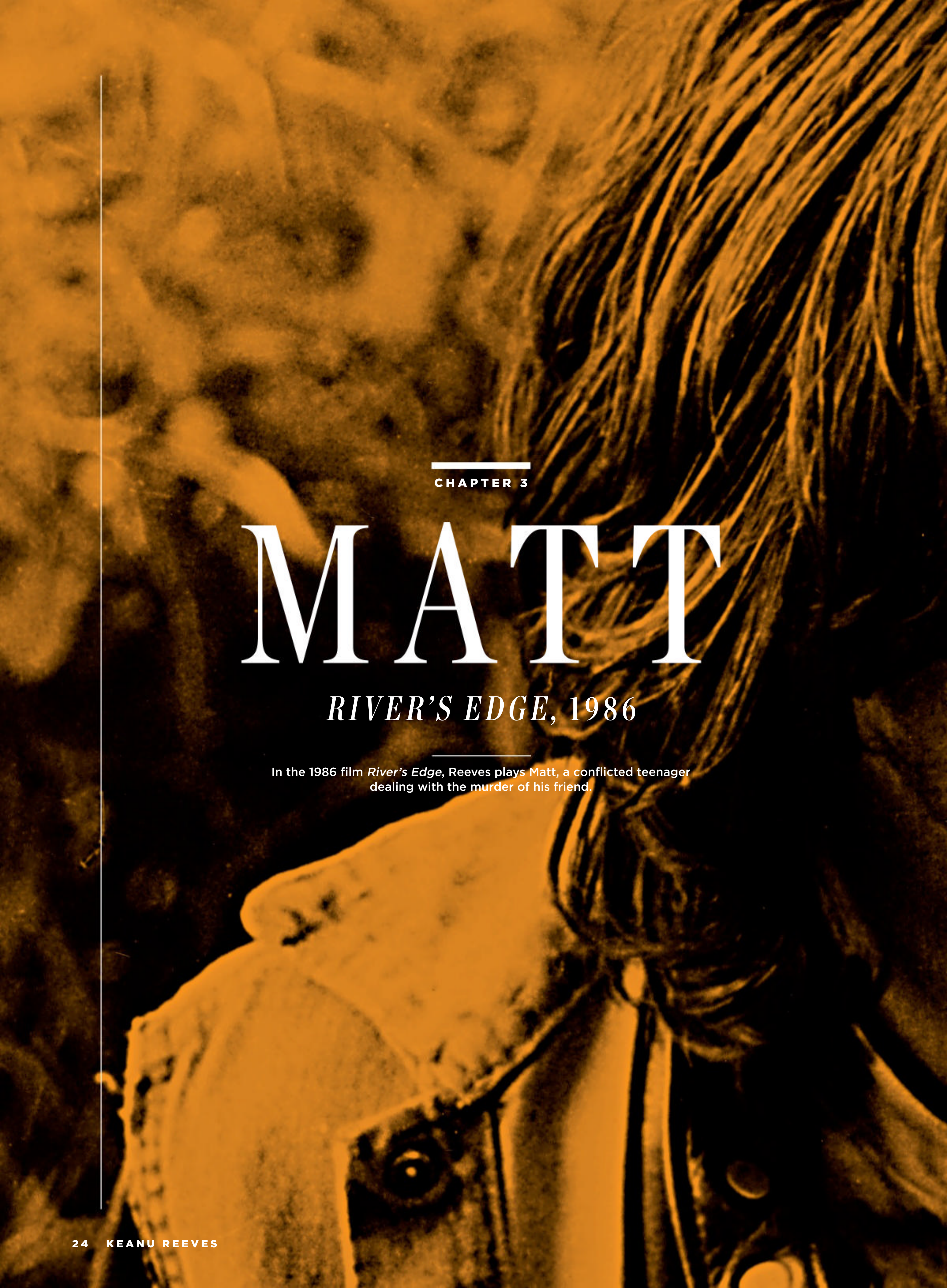
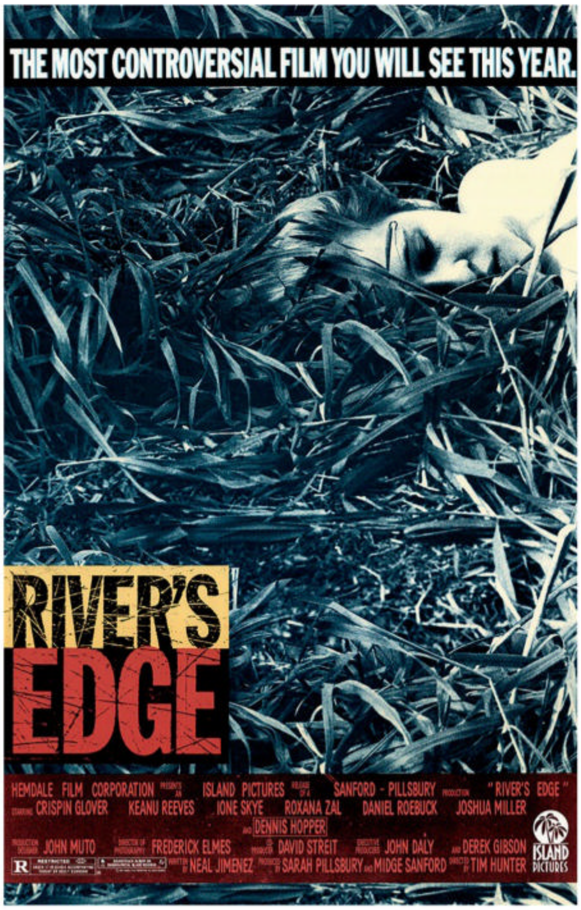


CHAPTER 3

MATT

RIVER'S EDGE, 1986

In the 1986 film *River's Edge*, Reeves plays Matt, a conflicted teenager dealing with the murder of his friend.


THE MOST CONTROVERSIAL FILM YOU WILL SEE THIS YEAR.
RIVER'S EDGE
HEMDALE FILM CORPORATION ISLAND PICTURES SANFORD - PILLSBURY "RIVER'S EDGE"
CRISPIN GLOVER KEANU REEVES IONE SKYE ROXANA ZAL DANIEL ROEBUCK JOSHUA MILLER
DENNIS HOPPER
JOHN MUTO FREDERICK ELMES DAVID STREIT JOHN DALY DEREK GIBSON
NEAL JIMENEZ SARAH PILLSBURY MIDGE SANFORD TIM HUNTER
R RESTRICTED
ISLAND PICTURES

The Part: Teenager Matt is caught up in an emotional drama after a friend, Jamie, is killed. He is both surprised by how apathetic he is about the murder and conflicted by a desire to protect his other friends from suspicion—including John (Daniel Roebuck), whom he knows to be the actual killer.

As a result, he is the centerpiece of a dark movie about the morality—or lack thereof—of American teenagers caught up in the drug culture of the 1980s. For much of the film, Matt grapples with his own moral compass, particularly in his battles with his younger brother, Tim (Joshua John Miller). For brief moments throughout, Matt finds the courage to do the right things. He is the one who leads the police to a dead boy, for example. And he is the one who eventually turns John in.

John, though, is killed by another one of their friends before police can arrest him. It's not until Jamie's funeral that Matt and the other supposedly typical American teenagers finally show the emotion they should have been showing all along.

Legendary Line: "I don't know how I felt."

Behind the Scenes: In 2015, *Salon* called this movie "the darkest teen film of all time." It

TEEN DRAMA
River's Edge was released in 1986. In 2015, *Salon* named it "the darkest teen film of all time."

CHAPTER 3

DANGEROUS YOUTH
Daniel Roebuck (below) plays John, a teenager who murders his girlfriend, Jamie, and then ends up dead before he's arrested.

GREAT CASTING
River's Edge featured actors Crispin Glover and Dennis Hopper (right), and was the debut film for Ione Skye (right, bottom, with Reeves).

> "HE WALKED IN THE DOOR, AND I WENT, 'OH MY GOD, THIS IS MY GUY.'"

certainly painted a bleak picture of America's youth as aimless, uncaring, drug-addled, amoral and seemingly unfit for society.

That doesn't really seem to describe Reeves, and yet it took Carrie Frazier, the casting director, just seconds to decide he was perfect for the role of Matt.

"He walked in the door, and I went, 'Oh my god, this is my guy!'" Frazier told *Vice*. "It was just because of the way he held his body—his shoes were untied, and what he was wearing looked like a young person growing into being a man. I was over the moon about him."

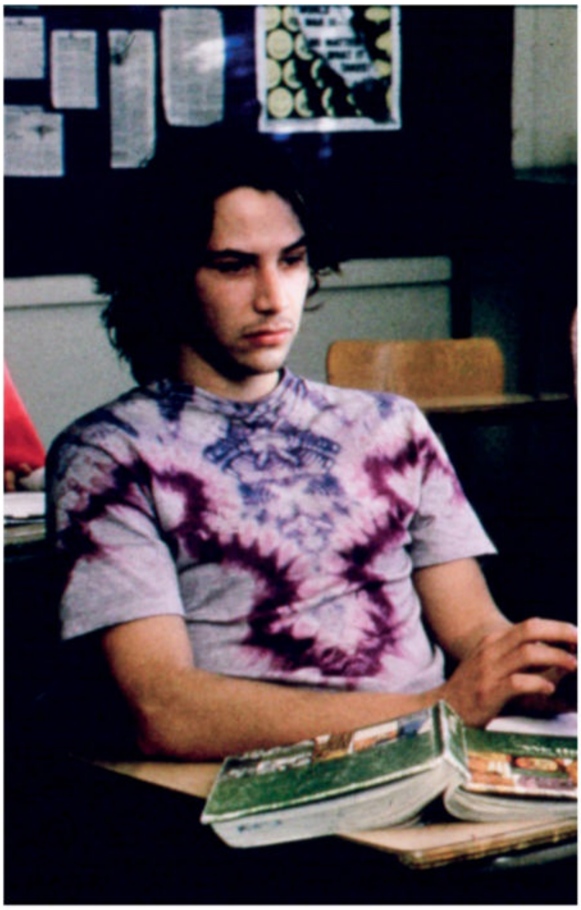
River's Edge is loosely based on a real-life event—the murder of Marcy Renee Conrad in 1981 in Milpitas, California. She was raped and strangled by Anthony Jacques Broussard, who reportedly bragged to friends about the crime and showed off her dead body to 13 different people. Remarkably, despite his openness, it took two days for the crime to be reported.

Neal Jimenez was taking screenwriting classes at UCLA when Conrad was murdered and said the event was the inspiration for the screenplay.

Filming was actually supposed to take place about two hours north of where that murder occurred, in Sacramento. But just before production was set to begin a major flood hit the area, which

CHAPTER 3

STAR IN THE MAKING
Keanu Reeves' Matt has the courage to bring police to the location of his dead friend's body. For his third feature film, Reeves received rave reviews.

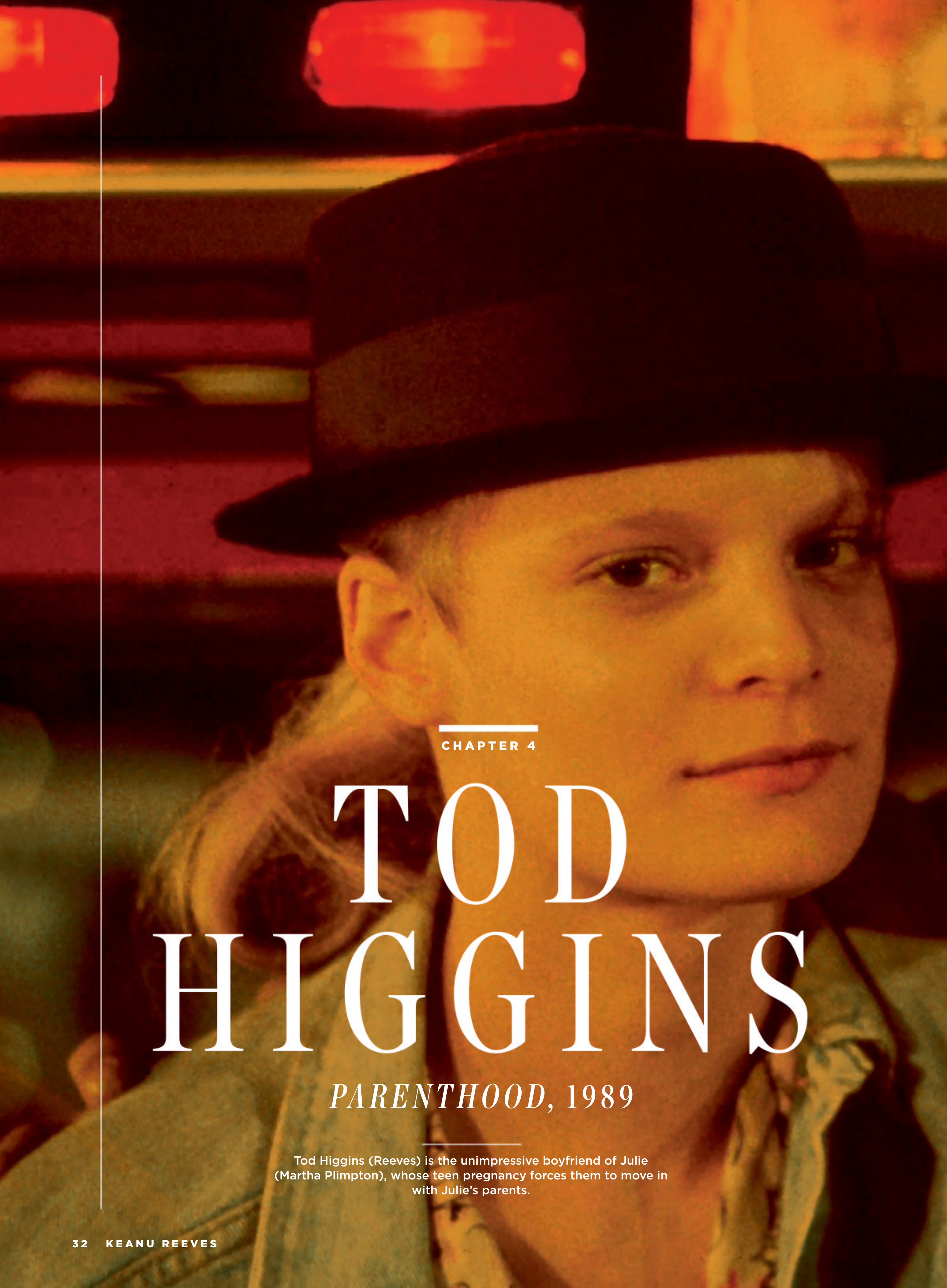


caused the production team to scramble. They ended up settling on a small town in the foothills near Los Angeles.

The dark nature of the film bothered some. Tim Hunter, the director, said he originally wanted John Lithgow for the part of "Feck," but he told *Vice* "it was too dark—he wanted no part of it." Reeves had no such reservations, and his decision to take the part paid off. He received rave reviews for his performance, in what was only his third feature film.

The film premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival in September 1986, but it wasn't immediately picked up for release. Hunter said after that he took the film "to every ... festival screening I could," until he finally found success at Sundance. That's where an executive from Island Pictures saw it, Hunter told *Salon*, and said, "I don't know how I'm gonna to sell this movie, but I'm gonna to figure it out."

River's Edge wasn't distributed in the United States until May 1987. It only grossed $4.6 million, but critic Gene Siskel said it was one of the best films of 1987, and his co-host, Roger Ebert, wrote that it was "the best analytical film about a crime since *The Onion Field* and *In Cold Blood* ... [it] is not a film I will forget very soon."



CHAPTER 4

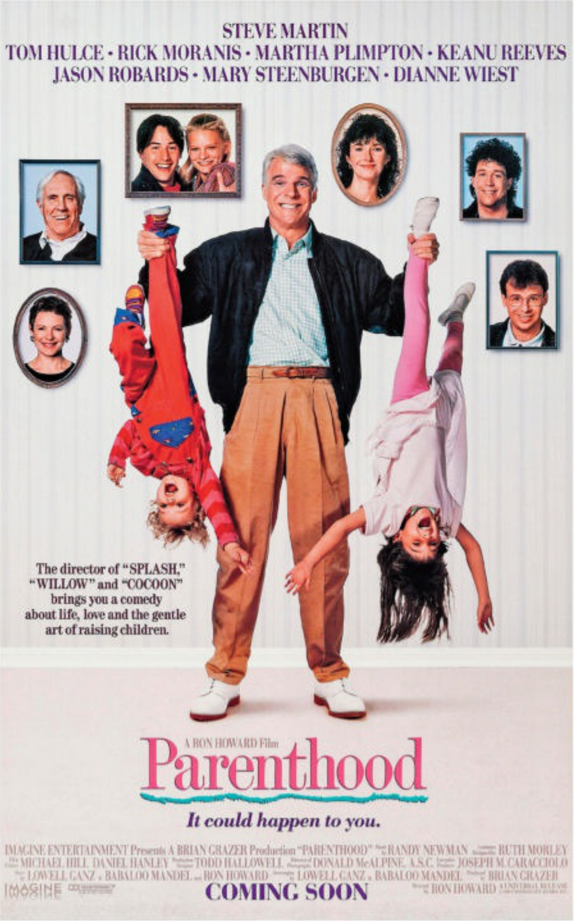
TOD HIGGINS

PARENTHOOD, 1989

Tod Higgins (Reeves) is the unimpressive boyfriend of Julie (Martha Plimpton), whose teen pregnancy forces them to move in with Julie's parents.

CHAPTER 4

FAMILY FUN
Ron Howard's 1989 comedy-drama featured an ensemble cast with stars including Steve Martin, Dianne Wiest, Rick Moranis and Mary Steenburgen.


STEVE MARTIN
TOM HULCE • RICK MORANIS • MARTHA PLIMPTON • KEANU REEVES
JASON ROBARDS • MARY STEENBURGEN • DIANNE WIEST
The director of "SPLASH," "WILLOW" and "COCOON" brings you a comedy about life, love and the gentle art of raising children.
A RON HOWARD Film
Parenthood
It could happen to you.
IMAGINE ENTERTAINMENT Presents A BRIAN GRAZER Production "PARENTHOOD" RANDY NEWMAN RUTH MORLEY
MICHAEL HILL DANIEL HANLEY TODD HALLOWELL DONALD McALPINE, A.S.C. JOSEPH M. CARACCIOLO
LOWELL GANZ & BABALOO MANDEL and RON HOWARD LOWELL GANZ & BABALOO MANDEL BRIAN GRAZER
IMAGINE
COMING SOON
RON HOWARD

The Part: In this feel-good comedy-drama, Tod Higgins joins a slightly dysfunctional family as the unimpressive boyfriend of Julie (Martha Plimpton), a high school girl with no interest in high school. He eventually marries Julie, who then becomes pregnant, and together they all move into the house of Julie's mother, Helen (Dianne Wiest), who is against the relationship.

Over time, Tod reveals himself to be a somewhat mature and surprisingly deep and wise young man. He becomes a temporary father figure/big brother to Helen's younger son, Garry (Joaquin Phoenix), who has an obsession with girls, sex and pornography. Tod counsels Garry and assures him he's just a normal boy. Helen takes notice of Tod's compassion and guidance and begins to change her opinion of him.

In fact, she not only grows to support the relationship of Tod and Julie, she intervenes when Julie decides she wants to end it. She doesn't, and they all grow into one big, happy family.

Legendary Line: "You know, Mrs. Buckman, you need a license to buy a dog, or drive a car—hell, you even need a license to catch a fish. But they'll let any butt-reaming a-----e be a father."

FAMILY TIES
Tod (Reeves) reveals himself to be a surprisingly deep and wise young man, and a temporary father figure to Julie's younger brother, Garry (Joaquin Phoenix).

BIG DEBUT
Steve Martin (below, with his wife at the time, actress Victoria Tennant), attends the Los Angeles premiere of *Parenthood* with Cheryl and Ron Howard in 1989.

Behind the Scenes: Acclaimed director Ron Howard came up with the idea for this film while flying to Buenos Aires to film the comedy *Gung Ho*. Accompanying him on the 17-hour plane trip was his wife, Cheryl; their 4-year-old daughter Bryce, who would grow up to become an actor and director herself; and their 7-month-old twins Jocelyn and Paige.

The chaos of the kids getting sick and acting like infants, he told *Off Camera*, made him think his family situation would make a good comedy.

"The babies were crying, and I was helping Cheryl," he recalled, "and we were just walking them and driving the [flight] crew crazy."

He later combined his experiences with those of producer Brian Grazer and screenwriters Lowell Ganz and Babaloo Mandel—who had 17 kids between them and countless hysterical stories to tell. Many of the scenes were taken straight from their own lives.

One of the largest stars of the ensemble cast was comedian Steve Martin, but he wasn't the first choice for the role of Gil Buckman. The part was offered to Jeff Goldblum, but he declined. The producers and writers also considered Dan Akroyd, Michael Keaton, Robin Williams, Chevy Chase, Billy Crystal, Tom Selleck, Bill Murray, Tim Allen and Tom Hanks.

The large cast, which included four future Oscar winners, was shot around Orlando, Florida, including scenes at Universal Studios Theme Park. While filming, the cast enjoyed playing a strange "murder" game, where one person (the murderer) tried to "kill" other players by looking at them without giving themselves away to others. Apparently, they are actually playing the game during the dinner scene where everyone is sitting around a table.

Reeves' performance earned positive reviews, but it was lost in the large ensemble cast that included some much bigger stars at the time, including Martin, Wiest, Rick Moranis, Mary Steenburgen and Phoenix, who was credited as "Leaf Phoenix" in the film—the final time he would go by that name.

The film was a commercial success, grossing about $100 million in the United States. It also became a "video store classic" and later spawned two television series of the same name. The first adaptation ran during the 1990–91 television season, though it only lasted for 12 episodes on NBC. The network tried again 20 years later and the second version, which debuted in 2010, was far more successful and ran for six seasons.

ENSEMBLE CAST
The large cast—including comedian Steve Martin (left)—also starred Rick Moranis, Harley Jane Kozak and Tom Hulce (right, top).

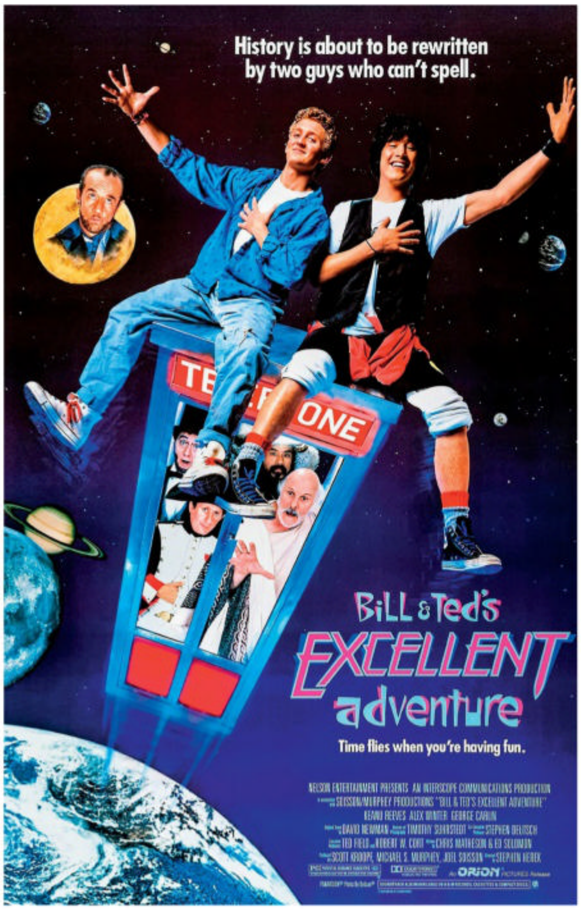
BEST MATCH
Martin in a scene as Gil Buckman (right, bottom) in *Parenthood.* Jeff Goldblum, Robin Williams, Tom Hanks and other actors were also considered for the role.

CHAPTER 5

TED “THEODORE” LOGAN

BILL & TED’S EXCELLENT ADVENTURE, 1989

One of the most off-beat characters of Reeves’ early career, Ted Logan has become one of the actor’s most enduring and adored roles.


History is about to be rewritten by two guys who can't spell.
TELEPHONE
Bill & Ted's
EXCELLENT
adventure
Time flies when you're having fun.
ORION

The Part: Ted Logan is a dim, goofy, yet lovable high school student from San Dimas, California, who joins forces with his best friend, Bill, to form a rock group called the Wyld Stallyns. They are oblivious to the world around them.

The film begins with Ted being on the verge of failing history class. If he does, his father plans to ship him off to a military school in Alaska.

But it turns out Wyld Stallyns is destined to become the greatest rock band of all time, with music that inspires humanity to create a utopian society. That won't happen if Ted fails history and is shipped off to Alaska. So, a mysterious man named Rufus, from the year 2688, uses a time-traveling phone booth to return to the 1980s to take Bill and Ted on an excellent adventure through history, where they meet several key figures and go back to the '80s so they can give their final history report and pass the class.

Once they do get a passing grade, it ensures that Bill and Ted—and Wyld Stallyns—will achieve their destiny of saving the world.

Legendary Line: "EXCELLENT!"

Behind the Scenes: The wildly funny original idea of Bill and Ted came from the minds of two

BEST BUDDIES
Ted Logan is a dim yet lovable high school student who forms a rock band—one that's destined to save the world—with his best friend, Bill (below, left).

CHAPTER 5

HAPPY ACCIDENT
It took the producers a long time to find someone to embody the mysterious Rufus before they landed on George Carlin (below).

WYLD STALLYNS
Right: During the casting of *Bill & Ted*, Reeves was hoping to play the role of Bill while Alex Winter wanted to play Ted.

> "IT WAS MUCH CLOSER TO THE CHOPPING BLOCK THAN ANYONE KNOWS."

UCLA students—Ed Solomon and Chris Matheson—who were part of a student improv club.

"One day we decided to do a couple of guys who knew nothing about history, talking about history," Solomon told *Cinemafantastique*. "The initial improv was them studying history while Ted's father kept coming up to ask them to turn their music down."

It also was originally a threesome. Their skit included Bill, Ted and "Bob."

The characters weren't really age-appropriate for Keanu Reeves, who was already in his early 20s when the movie was filmed. And once he and his co-star Alex Winter were cast, it was clear they couldn't play the parts as written.

"But once you cast Alex and Keanu, who look like pretty cool guys," Solomon said, "that was hard to believe."

Reeves and Winter met at auditions, where all the actors were trying out for both roles, and they instantly hit it off. When they were cast, though, there was one problem: Reeves was hoping to play the role of Bill, not Ted. And Winter wanted the role of Ted, not Bill.

"I got a call saying that I got the part," Reeves said in an online interview with *Moviefone*. "So, I went to the wardrobe fitting assuming I was playing Bill, and I get there and Alex Winter,

CHAPTER 5

TIME TRAVELERS
Bill and Ted travel to the past in a time-traveling phone booth along with Rufus, who helps them learn history so they can pass their class and save humanity.

PHONE
SAVE THE HUMANS

Nintendo
GAME BOY™
Bill & Ted's
EXCELLENT
A GAME BOY
adventure™
OFFICIAL
GAME BOY
GAME PAK
TELEPHONE
A BOGUS JOURNEY!
LJN LTD.
LICENSED BY
Nintendo
Official Nintendo Seal of Quality

CULTURAL EXPLOSION
Bill & Ted went on to gross $40 million and spark a cultural and merchandizing explosion that included video games (right), novels, action figures and cereal.

who eventually played Bill, went to the wardrobe fitting thinking he was playing Ted. Then we were informed that that wasn't the case."

It also took a long time before the producers found the right person to play Rufus. They were looking at "serious" actors, as Winter once told *The Guardian*, including Sean Connery. Director Stephen Herek told *The Hollywood Reporter* that they also considered rock stars like Eddie Van Halen, Ringo Starr and Roger Daltrey.

It was a "happy accident," Winter said, that they remained undecided long enough for someone to suggest comedian George Carlin, who jumped at the chance to join the film.

The movie almost never saw the dark of a theater. The original production company, De Laurentiis Entertainment Group, shelved it when it filed for bankruptcy before the film's release date.

"I hate to say it, but we kind of gave up on the movie," Winter told *The Guardian*. "It was much closer to the chopping block than anyone knows."

Eventually, Nelson Entertainment and Orion Pictures bought the film for $1 million. It would go on to gross $40 million.

It would also spark a cultural and merchandising explosion. There was a *Bill & Ted* animated series, a *Bill & Ted* live-action TV series, *Bill & Ted* novels, video games, action figures, lunch boxes, and even a *Bill & Ted* cereal.

"It was just kind of funny," Reeves told *The Hollywood Reporter*. "It's like, 'Oh, here's a lunch box with Bill and Ted! And here's a cereal! And here's a cartoon! It was an example of going vertical."

The film and the characters became so popular, so iconic, so everywhere, that Reeves has joked several times that someday it will say on his gravestone: "Here lies Keanu Reeves. He played Ted."

CHAPTER 6

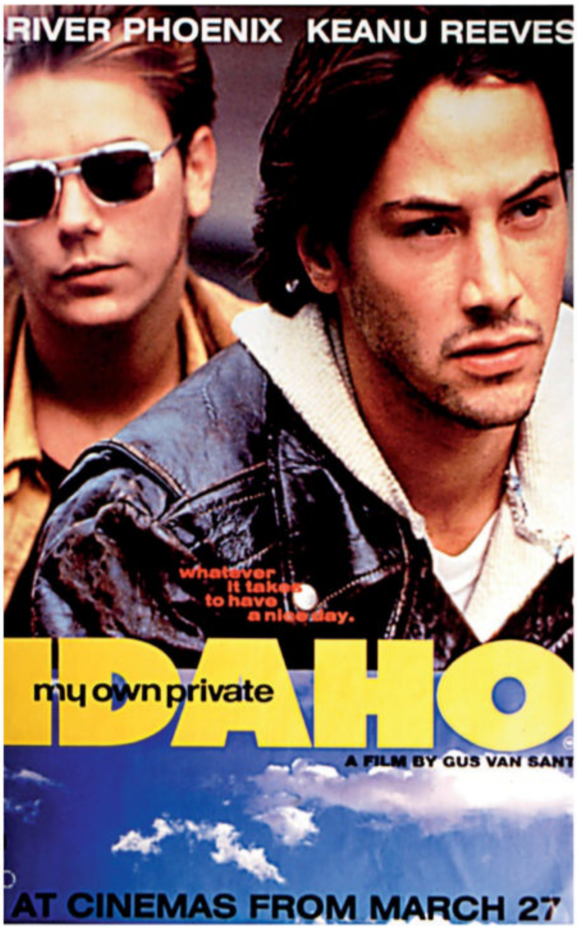
SCOTT FAVOR

MY OWN PRIVATE IDAHO, 1991

The 1991 Gus Van Sant drama featured Keanu Reeves and River Phoenix as two street hustlers in the Pacific Northwest.

CHAPTER 6

HARD AT WORK
Director Gus Van Sant (below, far left) with River Phoenix (center) and Keanu Reeves on the set of *My Own Private Idaho.*



The Part: Scott is a "street hustler"—or a male prostitute—who has sex with both women and men for money. It's a job he says he intends to retire from when he turns 21, when he will be able to inherit a fortune from his father, who is the mayor of Portland, Oregon.

At heart, Scott is a spoiled rich kid who took to prostitution as a way of rejecting his father and his wealthy life while proving his own independence.

Scott eventually joins his best friend, Mike Waters (River Phoenix)—another street hustler—on a journey from Oregon to Idaho, and later to Rome, in search of Mike's long-lost mother. It becomes a journey of self-discovery as Scott learns that Mike is secretly in love with him. But Scott is not gay, and later falls in love with a woman named Carmela when Mike and Scott travel to Italy. They leave to return to the United States, where Scott inherits his father's fortune, leaving a broken-hearted Mike all alone.

Legendary Line: "When I turn 21, I don't want any more of this life. My mother and father will be surprised at the incredible change. It will impress them more when such a f--k-up like me turns good than if I had been a good son all along."

INDIE DRAMA
Phoenix (far left) and Reeves fully embraced their roles and the script, which was based on *Henry IV* by William Shakespeare.

Behind the Scenes: It was quite a startling transition for Reeves to go from the goofy, lovable slacker Ted in *Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure* to this very serious role and film, and it marked a transition in his growing career.

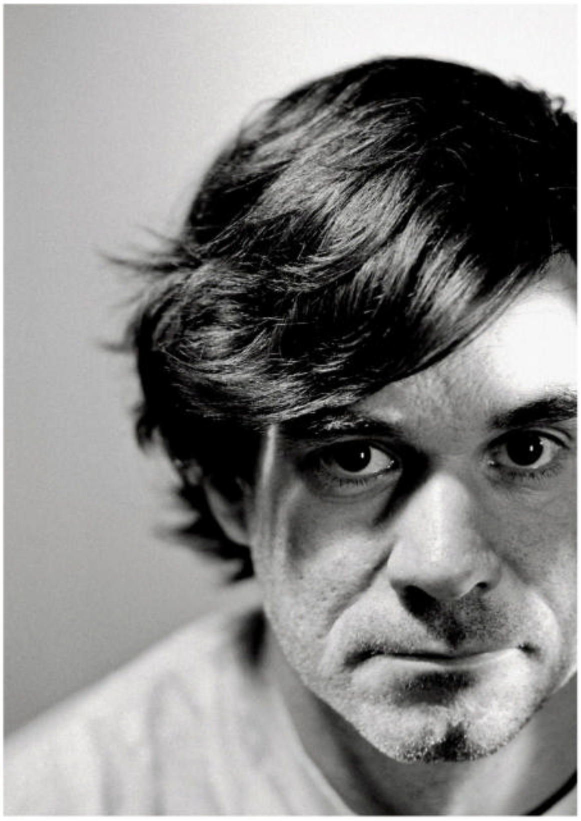
This was such a risk, and such a controversial film, that it almost didn't happen. Because of the explicit sexual themes, most Hollywood studios wouldn't touch Gus Van Sant's screenplay. At one point, he considered financing it mostly himself and using actual street kids to play the parts. It was so rejected by Hollywood that Phoenix's agent, Iris Burton, refused to even show her client the script.

But Reeves' agent did show it to his client, and not only did he accept the role, he offered to convince Phoenix to join him. He even made the motorcycle ride from Canada to Florida over the Christmas holidays to make the pitch. It helped that he had already worked with River's brother, Joaquin Phoenix.

Years later, actor Kiefer Sutherland told Onthebox.com that he had been offered the part of Mike before Phoenix finally accepted it. But he had already made plans to go skiing. "I told myself that I needed to stick to my plan," Sutherland said. "It was a really dumb plan."

Reeves and Phoenix fully embraced their roles and the script, which was loosely based on William Shakespeare's *Henry IV* and named after a B-52s song called "Private Idaho."

In part to save money for their small production budget, much of the cast lived at Van Sant's newly purchased home in Portland during filming. That included Reeves and Phoenix and "Flea"—Michael Peter Balzary—of the band the Red Hot Chili Peppers, who also was in the film. It was a rowdy, frat-house like environment, complete with late-



night parties and jam sessions, including Reeves playing bass guitar.

It got so crazy, in fact, that Van Sant eventually moved out so he could get some rest.

Van Sant's original script was only 70 pages long—maybe enough for an hour run time. He had planned for the actors to do a lot of their own improvisation, which is what happened. Phoenix, in fact, wrote the famous campfire scene where his character Mike finally confesses his love for Scott.

Over the years, this film has become an important part of New Queer Cinema—a movement to promote and celebrate independent films with LGBTQ representation. But it was not received well in the community at first. The Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) criticized Van Sant and the fictional Mike and Scott, saying the characters were portrayed as deviants, not normal people.

"Eventually, within a year or two, they kind of recanted their position," Van Sant told *Highsnobiety* magazine. "But, politically, it was not hailed as a great queer film or anything."

The movie first premiered at several film festivals before getting a very limited release in theaters. It grossed $6.4 million, still a good return on its $2.5 million budget.

AUTEUR
Director Gus Van Sant (above) pictured in 1991. Van Sant's script for *Idaho* was only 70 pages long and required improvisation from the actors.

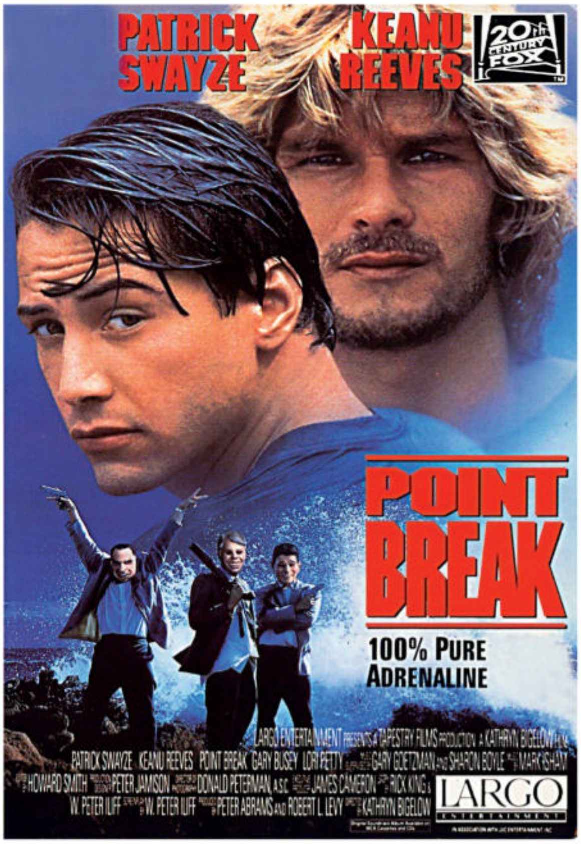
IMPROVISING
River Phoenix wrote the famous campfire scene (right) where his charactor Mike confesses his love for best friend Scott.

CHAPTER 7

JOHNNY UTAH

POINT BREAK, 1991

Point Break—the story of a young FBI agent who goes undercover with local surfers to investigate a string of bank robberies—is a cult favorite.



The Part: Johnny Utah is a former Ohio State quarterback and a rookie FBI agent who is part of a team investigating a series of bank robberies. The crimes are committed by a group known as "The Ex-Presidents" because they wear rubber masks resembling Ronald Reagan, Jimmy Carter, Richard Nixon and Lyndon Johnson.

One of the FBI agents on the team has a theory that the criminals are actually surfers. So Utah is sent undercover to infiltrate the surfing community to see if he can uncover the gang of thieves.

First, he has to learn to surf, and as he does, he is embraced by a group led by a surfer named Bodhi (Patrick Swayze), who recognizes Utah from his college football days. As Utah becomes more involved in the surf community, he begins to appreciate their lifestyle and grows closer to the members. That becomes a huge problem when he and his boss, Agent Angelo Pappas (Gary Busey), discover that the group he's infiltrated is actually The Ex-Presidents.

It becomes even more of a problem when Bodhi and The Ex-Presidents learn they have an FBI agent in their midst.

Legendary Line: "Vaya con dios."

Behind the Scenes: About four years before production started on *Point Break*, a different

SURFER STYLE
Patrick Swayze (below, left) as Bodhi and Keanu Reeves as Agent Johnny Utah in 1991's *Point Break.*

VETERAN AGENT
Gary Busey (below) plays Johnny Utah's seasoned boss at the FBI, Agent Angelo Pappas.

STUNTMAN
Patrick Swayze (as Bodhi, right) insisted on performing his own stunts, which led to four cracked ribs from surfing.

> “THE STUDIO WENT ‘KEANU REEVES? JOHNNY UTAH? ACTION MOVIE?’”

version of the film was being considered in 1987. Ridley Scott was supposed to be the director, and Matthew Broderick, Johnny Depp, Val Kilmer and Charlie Sheen were all being considered for the role of Johnny Utah.

That version fell through. Eventually, Kathryn Bigelow took over the project and developed the script with her husband, James Cameron. The original script, by W. Peter Iliff, was about skateboarding, not surfing. That changed as the script was further developed.

Once they had a script, Bigelow insisted on Reeves as the lead character, and she had to fight to get the studio to agree.

“I hadn't been in an action genre picture,” Reeves said on *The Nerdist* podcast. “So Kathryn Bigelow, as the story's told, really had to fight to have me play that role. The studio went, ‘Keanu Reeves? Johnny Utah? Action movie?’ Kathryn went, ‘Yes.’ They were like, ‘What are you thinking?’ [She said,] ‘He's the guy.’”

From there, Bigelow cast Swayze and Busey, and then added Lori Petty as Tyler. The film was supposed to be called *Johnny Utah*. But the studio didn't like that name, and felt it put the spotlight too much on Reeves' character, overlooking Swayze. So, it was switched to *Riders on the Storm*, after the famous song by The Doors. But that had

Pressurized
Radar Equipped

CHAPTER 7

CULT CLASSIC *Point Break*, which also starred John C. McGinley (below, right) and Lori Petty (right), grossed more than $83 million worldwide and was a cultural phenomenon.

nothing to do with surfing or the movie, either. They didn't decide on *Point Break* as a title until halfway through production.

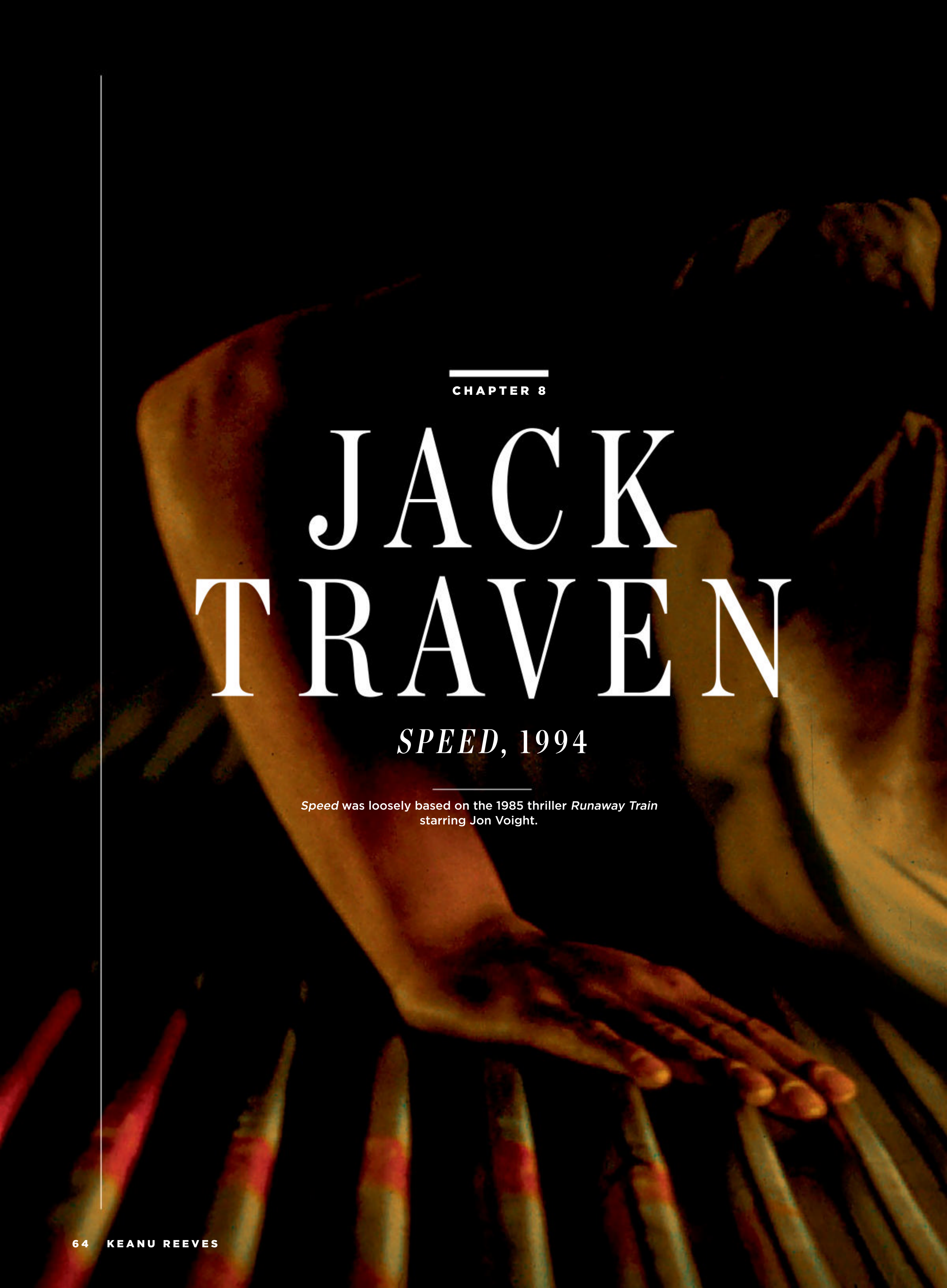
Of course, to make the film believable, the actors needed to surf. Reeves had never surfed before and Petty said she had never even been in the ocean. So, Reeves, Petty and Swayze immediately took off for the Hawaiian island Kauai where they trained with professional surfer Dennis Jarvis.

Reeves also prepared for his role by observing actual FBI agents in Los Angeles, and he practiced some with UCLA quarterback coaches for the football scene.

Stunt doubles were, of course, used a lot in the film. But they were used for Reeves far more than they were used for Swayze, who often insisted on doing his own stunts. Swayze ended up cracking four ribs during surfing scenes in the film. He also liked to skydive and wanted to do those stunts for the film, too. The producers told him no, blaming it on insurance.

They did allow him one jump. In the scene where Bodhi yells "Adios amigo!" as he falls from the plane, that's actually Swazye, not his double. Reeves did not make a single jump out of a plane for the film.

The movie was a hit, grossing more than $83 million at the worldwide box office, and it turned into something of a cultural phenomenon.



CHAPTER 8

JACK TRAVEN

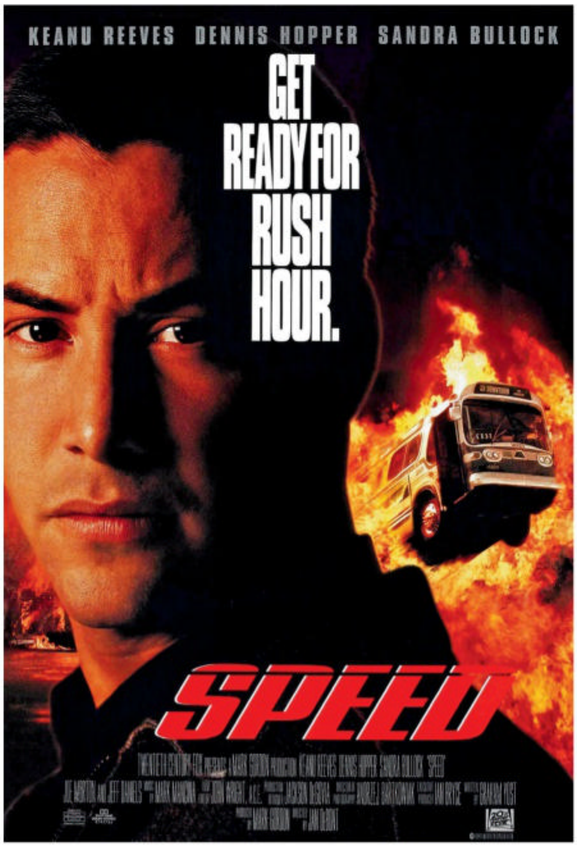
SPEED, 1994

Speed was loosely based on the 1985 thriller *Runaway Train* starring Jon Voight.

CHAPTER 8

Fire Extinguisher

HIGH-SPEED THRILLER Reeves (Jack) and Sandra Bullock (Annie) must keep a bus that's been rigged with a bomb moving above 50 mph to save the passengers onboard in *Speed*.


KEANU REEVES DENNIS HOPPER SANDRA BULLOCK
GET READY FOR RUSH HOUR.
SPEED

The Part: Jack is an intense member of the Los Angeles Police Department SWAT team who specializes in diffusing bombs. He is thrust into action early when he and his partner, Harry Temple (Jeff Daniels), try to rescue an elevator full of people from a mad bomber, Howard Payne (Dennis Hopper).

During the rescue attempt, Payne takes Harry hostage. But Jack intentionally shoots his partner in the leg, forcing Payne to release him, and the bomber flees the scene.

Jack and Harry are heroes. Meanwhile, Payne plots his revenge and begins by blowing up a Los Angeles bus. He calls a nearby pay phone and Jack answers. Payne tells him a bus has been rigged with an explosive device, and once the bus hits 50 miles per hour it will blow up as soon as its speed dips below 50.

Jack immediately springs into action, finding a way to board the bus and keep it above 50 miles per hour on a wild ride through the city of Los Angeles, until he can figure out a way to rescue all the passengers aboard.

Legendary Line: "I have to warn you, I've heard relationships based on intense experiences never work."

Behind the Scenes: Graham Yost got the idea

for his screenplay when he was told a story by his father, Elwy Yost, about a Jon Voight film called *Runaway Train*. Elwy recalled the film incorrectly, telling his son that the train was out of control because a bomb was on board. When Graham finally saw the movie, he decided it would better if a bomb had been on board. So, he began writing his script with that in mind.

His original idea was to have the film take place entirely on the bus. But the executives at Paramount, which first bought the rights to the film, told him: “No. Too much time on the bus.” So, the elevator and subway action sequences were added. The script also called for the bus to circle Dodger Stadium and eventually crash into the Hollywood sign, but the O’Malley family, who owned the Los Angeles Dodgers, didn’t like the idea and that was changed, too.

Reeves was also a late addition to the project. Jeff Speakman was originally supposed to star as Jack when Paramount was going to produce the picture, but that changed when it was sold to 20th Century Fox. Stephen Baldwin was then offered the job, but he declined. Yost told *Entertainment Weekly* that he and director Jan de Bont weren’t even considering Reeves for the role at first. They also approached Tom Cruise, Tom Hanks, Wesley

CASTING CALL
Reeves wasn’t initially considered for the part of Officer Jack Traven. The role was meant for actor Jeff Speakman and later offered to Stephen Baldwin.

BULKING UP
Reeves spent two months working out to add bulk to his lanky frame in order to get the look needed for a SWAT officer in Los Angeles.

CLOSE SHAVE
Thanks to his previous work as an FBI agent in *Point Break*, director Jan de Bont knew Reeves could handle a gun and play a believable cop in *Speed*.

Snipes, Woody Harrelson and others about the lead role.

"The way I recall it, someone's kid at the studio said, 'What about Keanu Reeves? He's hot,'" Yost recalled. "And we all looked at each other and said, 'Well, '*Bill & Ted*?'

"And then we said, 'Well, wait a second, he was great in *Parenthood*, let's meet him.'"

It helped that Reeves had just finished *Point Break*, proving he could play a cop in a movie.

"So, we knew he could handle a gun and be cop-like," Yost said. "We were looking for that ease and that sort of cop-ishness."

Reeves wasn't quite perfect, though. De Bont did not want Jack to be a skinny kid with long hair. He wanted him to look more like a stereotypical cop. "To me he represented something too young, too cool—hippie," de Bont told *Entertainment Weekly*. "He's represented too much the grunge look for too long. I felt like he had to grow up. In this movie he is really coming of age."

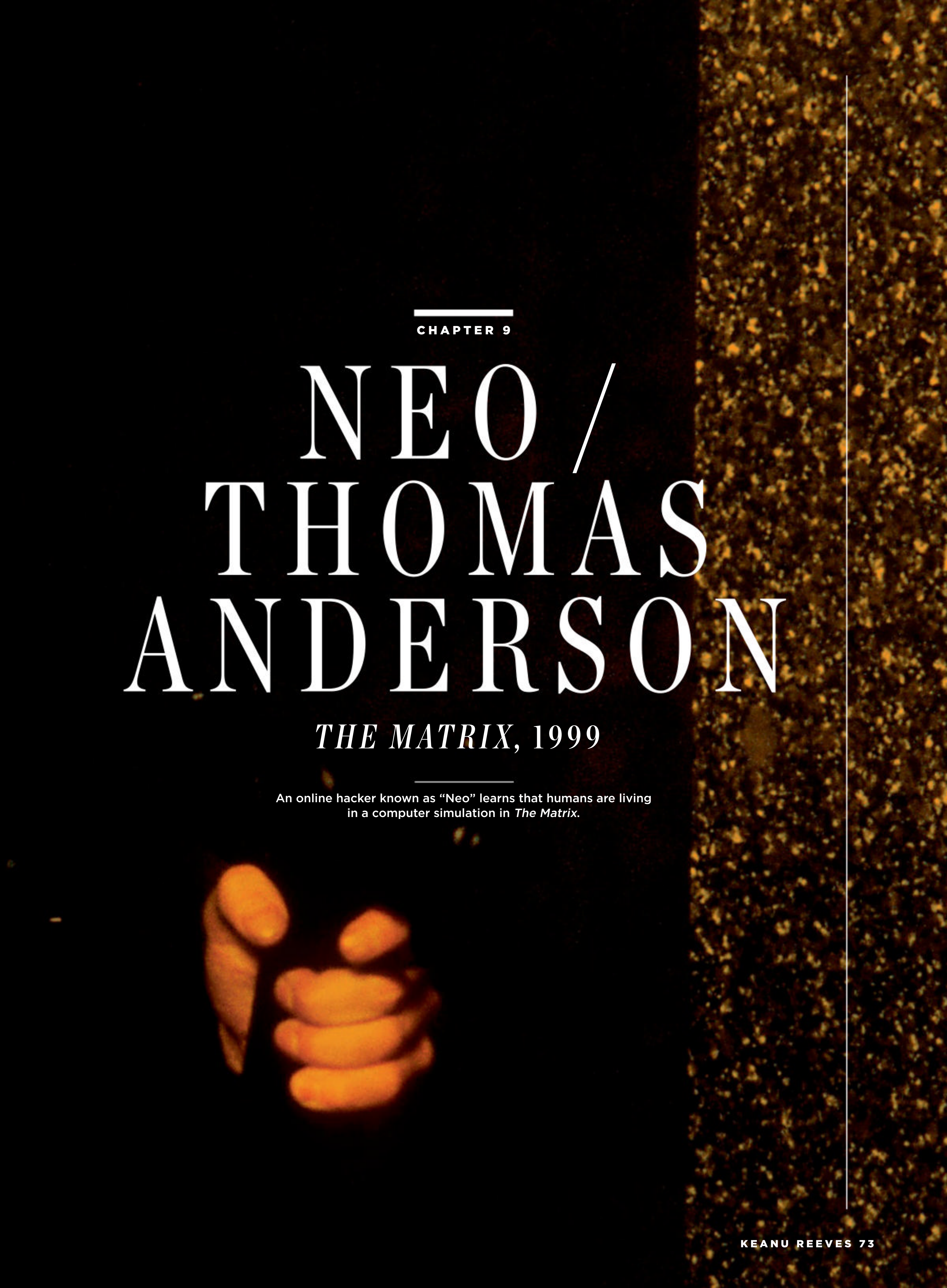
To start, Reeves shaved his head.

"Everyone at the studio was scared s--tless when they first saw it," de Bont recalled. "There was only like a millimeter. What you see in the movie is actually grown in."

Reeves also spent two months working out hard to add some bulk to his frame. "I didn't want to be cut," Reeves said. "But I wanted to have somewhat of a beefy aspect to my chest and arms."

During the filming of *Speed*, Reeves learned that his friend, and former co-star, River Phoenix had died of a drug overdose. The filming schedule was adjusted so Reeves would have time to grieve.

"It got to him emotionally," de Bont said. "He became very quiet, and it took him quite a while to work it out by himself and calm down. It scared the hell out of him."

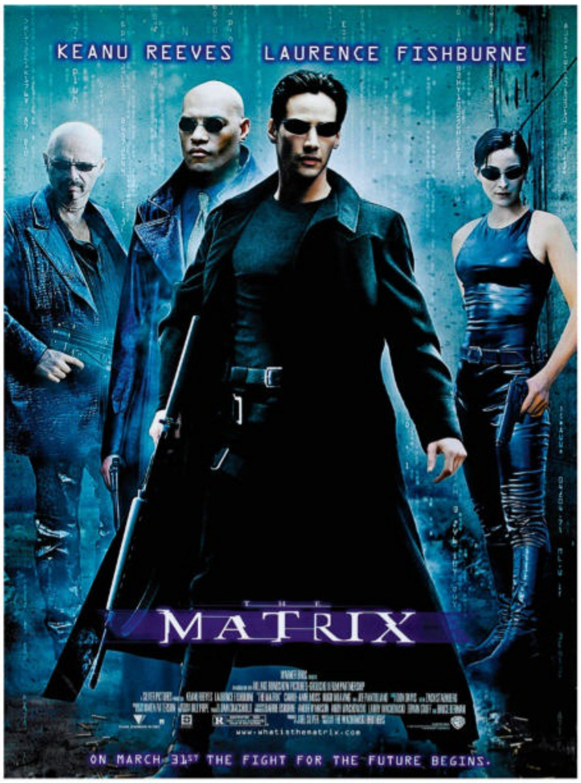


CHAPTER 9

NEO / THOMAS ANDERSON

THE MATRIX, 1999

An online hacker known as "Neo" learns that humans are living in a computer simulation in *The Matrix*.



The Part: Computer hacker Thomas Anderson (known as "Neo") is a man looking for answers about life, mostly online. He is confused during his many searches by repeated encounters with the phrase "The Matrix." A mysterious woman named Trinity reaches out to him and promises a man named Morpheus will be able to give him the answers he needs.

Before he can, a team of "agents" arrive at Anderson's workplace and capture Morpheus, whom they insist is a terrorist.

What Anderson doesn't know, of course, is that Morpheus is the leader of a rebellion in the "real" world, where humans lost a war with intelligent machines, who have captured them to feed on their bio-electric energy. To keep them enslaved, the machines allow humans to experience life in their mind in The Matrix—really a computer simulation that becomes the world in which Anderson and the rest of humanity unknowingly live.

Morpheus offers Anderson a choice of taking two pills. He can take the red one and learn the truth about The Matrix, or the blue one to forget it all and return to his normal life. He chooses red and escapes, eventually learning that Morpheus believes he is "The One" who can eventually end the destructive war.

Legendary Line: "You ever have that feeling where you're not sure if you're awake or still dreaming?"

ACTION PACKED
Carrie-Anne Moss (below, left) as Trinity and Keanu Reeves as Neo in the 1999 sci-fi thriller *The Matrix.*

FUTURISTIC FILM *The Matrix* directors, the Wachowskis, used “bullet time,” a filming technique for action sequences that uses regular speed and slow motion.

> “HONESTLY, I DIDN’T THINK THEY COULD DO IT, IT WAS TOO AMBITIOUS.”

Behind the Scenes: The master plan for the Wachowski siblings, the film’s creators and directors, was always to get Will Smith to play the part of Neo/Thomas Anderson in the *The Matrix*. And Smith was definitely interested.

But he passed on it to do *Wild Wild West* instead, in part because he was concerned about their desire to use “bullet time”—a filming technique in which action sequences moved between regular speed and slow motion, so viewers could follow things like the path of a bullet.

“Honestly, I didn’t think they could do it,” Smith told *Empire*. “It was too ambitious. ... I was like, ‘If that doesn’t work, the movie looks ridiculous.’”

Smith eventually admitted he regretted his choice. “That’s probably the only one that I turned down that I shouldn’t have,” he said.

Even after Smith passed on the part, it took a while for the filmmakers to turn to Reeves. They wanted to offer the part to Johnny Depp, but as composer Don Davis revealed in an interview with WhatIsTheMatrix.com, Warner Bros. was pushing for either Brad Pitt or Val Kilmer. David Duchovny, Nicholas Cage, Leonardo DiCaprio and Ewan McGregor were also under consideration.

But Warner Bros. really wanted Brad Pitt.

“If Brad Pitt would do the picture, they’d green light it right then,” Davis recalled. “After Kilmer and Brad Pitt said no, Warner Bros. was willing to consider Johnny Depp. So, it sort of came down to between Johnny Depp and Keanu Reeves.”

They had such a hard time deciding on a leading man that producer and Warner Bros. executive Lorenzo di Bonaventura told *The Wrap* that they once even considered changing Neo to a leading woman, offering the part to Sandra Bullock.

“We went to Sandy Bullock and said, ‘We’ll change Neo to a girl,’” he said. “It was pretty simple. We sent her the script to see if she was interested in it. And if she was interested in it we would try to make the change.”

Bullock wasn’t interested in the role. She also passed on the part of Trinity, which went to Carrie-Anne Moss.

Throughout the search, Reeves was the one who showed the most interest. “Keanu was always

CHAPTER 9

BIG PAYOFF
The Matrix was a hit, grossing over $460 million and continuing with two sequels and a fourth film that was released in 2021.

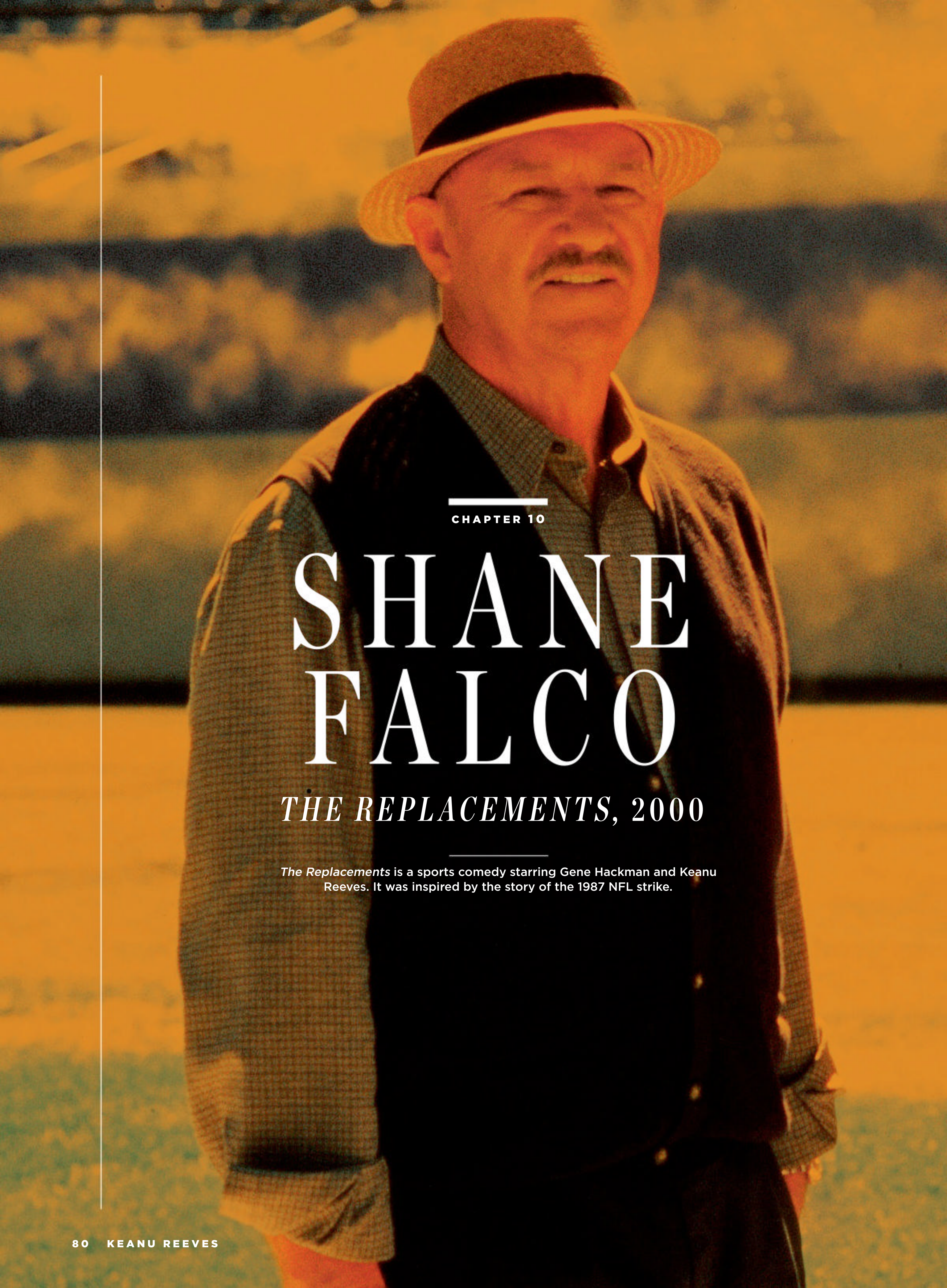
really tuned into the concept," Davis said, and that "made a big difference."

He had to be tuned in, because the Wachowskis insisted that everyone in the movie fully understand the concept of The Matrix—so much so that they could actually explain what The Matrix really was. Reeves had to prepare by reading books like *Out of Control: The New Biology of Machines, Social Systems and the Economic World* by Kevin Kelly, and *Simulacra and Simulation* by the French philosopher Jean Baudrillard, among others.

He also joined his fellow castmates in months of intense martial arts training with choreographer Yuen Woo-Ping. That wasn't easy for Reeves, who had suffered an injury that required spinal fusion surgery and caused some paralysis in his legs. The actor insisted on training anyway, though Yuen Woo-Ping only let him work on punches and easier moves.

The surgery left Reeves unable to kick for most of the training period, which is why Neo is rarely seen kicking during the fight sequences in the film.

Not that it mattered. Reeves and the "bullet time" action sequences were a hit. The movie, which had a large, $63 million budget, grossed more than $460 million, and it spawned two sequels that came out four years later, and a fourth film that came out 18 years after that.

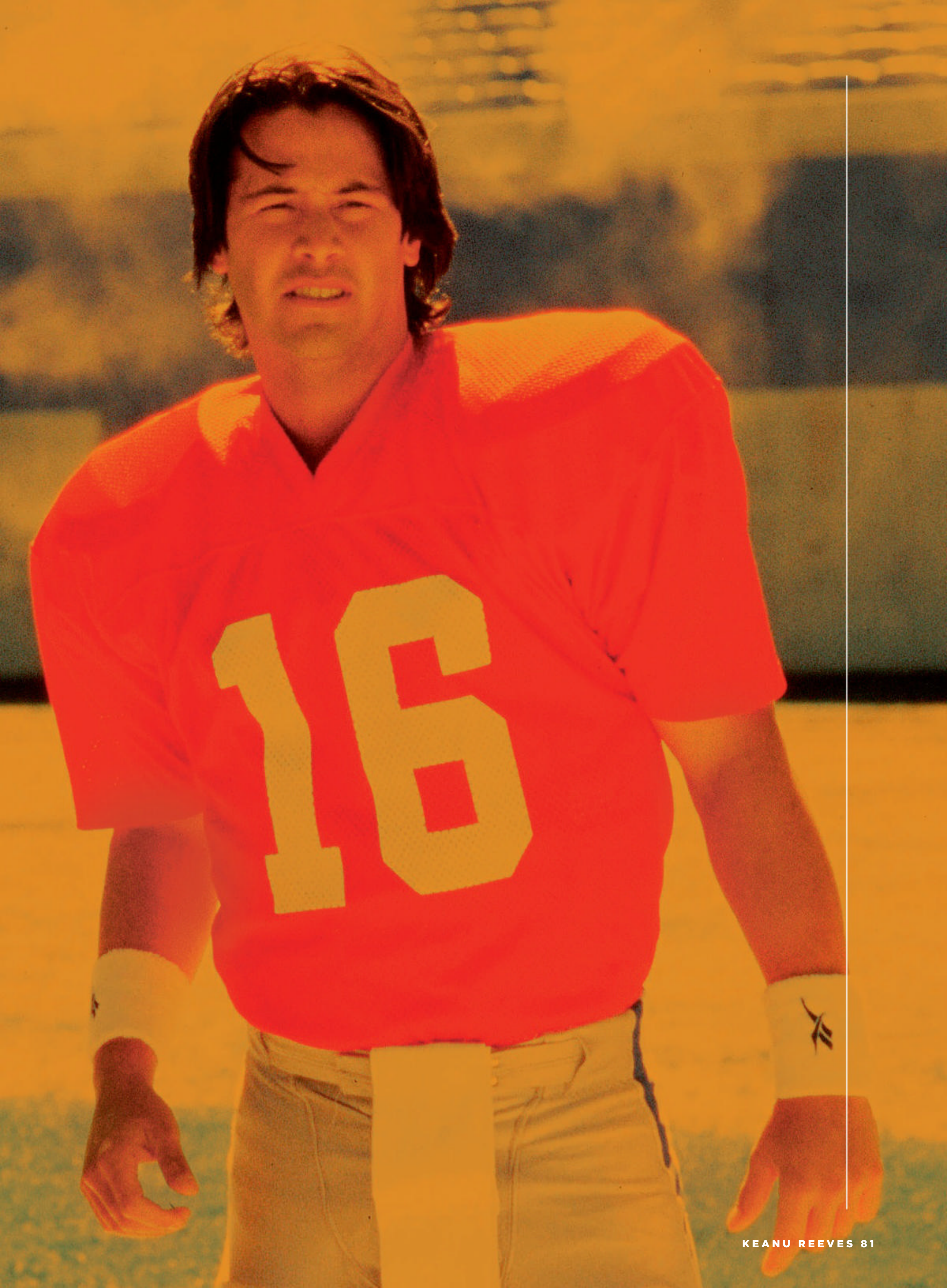


CHAPTER 10

SHANE FALCO

THE REPLACEMENTS, 2000

The Replacements is a sports comedy starring Gene Hackman and Keanu Reeves. It was inspired by the story of the 1987 NFL strike.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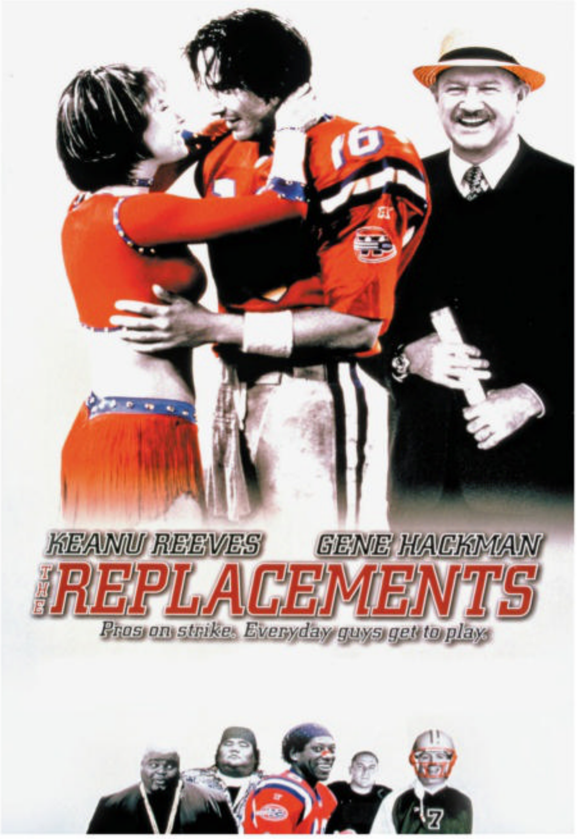


The Part: Shane Falco was once a football hero, an All-American quarterback at Ohio State, but his career fell apart after a disastrous performance and a lopsided loss in the 1996 Sugar Bowl. In an attempt to put his football failures in his past, Falco settled for a quiet life on a small houseboat docked at a marina in Washington, D.C., working as a maintenance man, cleaning and fixing the hulls of luxurious private yachts.

That all changes when players in a professional football league go on strike and Jimmy McGinty (Gene Hackman) is hired to coach the replacement players for the local team, the Washington Sentinels. McGinty approaches Falco to be his quarterback, believing he still has talent, not to mention unfinished business.

After refusing at first, Falco reluctantly agrees, though he draws the anger of the striking professional players who consider him and his teammates to be scabs. Along the way, Falco helps turn the replacement Sentinels into winners. And just as McGinty predicted, Falco becomes the leader of a team of misfits, searching for their one last shot at football greatness.

Legendary Line: “Pain heals. Chicks dig scars. Glory lasts forever.”

Behind the Scenes: The movie may be about a

LAST CHANCE
Reeves (below, right) stars as Shane Falco, a former All-American who leads a team of misfit replacement football players to victory during a pro football league players’ strike.

GATE A
Jee

SCENE STEALER
Actor Orlando Jones (below) plays a wide receiver who can't catch in his role as Clifford Franklin.

INSPIRED BY
The Replacements is about a fictional pro football team in an unnamed league, but is based on the 1987 NFL players' strike.

THE "SCABSKINS" WENT 3-0 **DURING THE ACTUAL** NFL STRIKE.

fictional pro football team in an unnamed league, but it is clearly based on the 1987 NFL players' strike. More specifically, the Washington Sentinels in the movie are modeled after the "replacement players" used during the strike by the NFL's Washington Redskins (now Commanders) that season.

The "Scabskins" went 3-0 during the actual NFL strike, while the Sentinels went 3-1. Washington was famously the only NFL team not to have any players cross the picket line during the strike (like the Sentinels), and both teams finished up their run shortly after the strike ended by beating a Dallas team that featured many of its actual players and stars who had already crossed.

Reeves, in the film, plays a former Ohio State quarterback—a familiar fictional role since he was also a former Ohio State quarterback in *Point Break*. He also personally chose his coach, taking a pay cut so the studio could afford to sign Gene Hackman to play Jimmy McGinty.

Reeves had never actually played organized football before—he was a youth hockey star while growing up in Canada—so he had to vigorously train for the role. He bulked up, gaining 27 pounds of muscle. He also spent three weeks with his cast/teammates at a high school in Maryland in a football minicamp, essentially learning how to

56
3

16

CHAPTER 10

FOOTBALL CAMP Having never played organized football before, Reeves had to train for his role in *The Replacements*, which also starred Brooke Langton (right).

play, under the direction of some local high school coaches and stunt coordinator Allan Graf.

"To go to training camp was a way for me to learn my character," Reeves told the *New York Post*. "I started to learn the dynamics of the team, who sits where, how you go to the field, who gets taped up, how people get warmed up, what the dynamics are between all the different players."

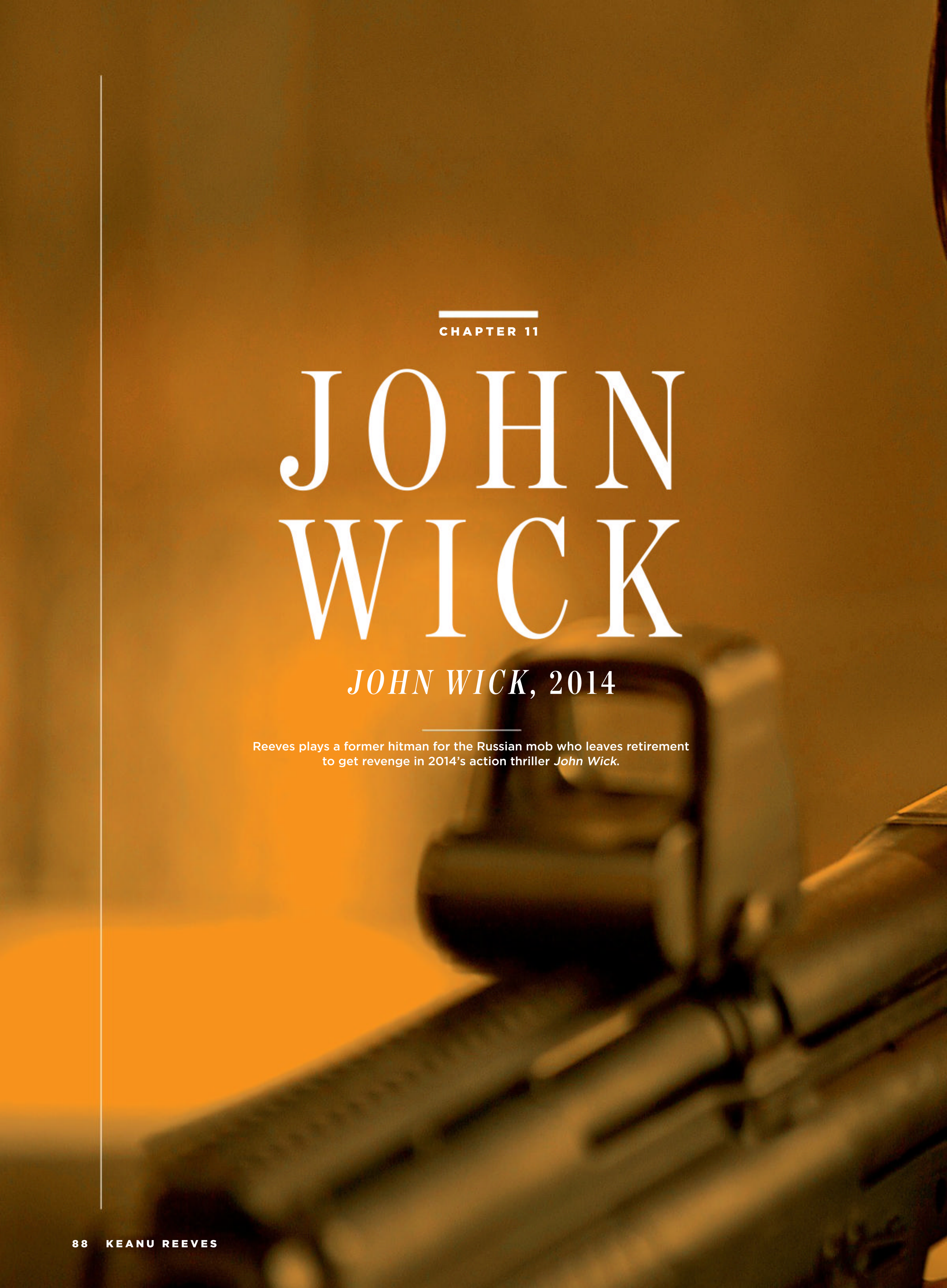
"I'd never played football," Reeves added. "I really wanted everyone watching the film to believe that Shane Falco was a quarterback."

Reeves said he modeled his character after former Denver Broncos quarterback John Elway, whom Reeves called "one of the kings of the game." But he also watched NFL films, to add bits of other famous quarterbacks to his character.

"I kind of got as many of those NFL films as I could," Reeves told New Jersey newspaper *The Bergen Record*. "I think I got about 32 of them. *The Hundred Greatest Comebacks*. *The Best Quarterbacks of All Time*. I looked at a lot of tape."

He not only had to look and act like a quarterback, he also had to actually play football—or at least a simulated version—in front of a crowd. The film shot many of its action scenes during halftime of a preseason football game between the Carolina Panthers and Baltimore Ravens in 1999 at the Ravens' home stadium. They were given nine and a half minutes on the field to shoot as many scenes as they could—including the climax of the film.

"That was really exciting," Reeves recalled. "That was the closest I came to playing football. We had to go on the field and execute [nine plays]. If we didn't, I didn't get a take two. They had to move on to another play. ... So that was the closest I came, and it was a lot of fun."



CHAPTER 11

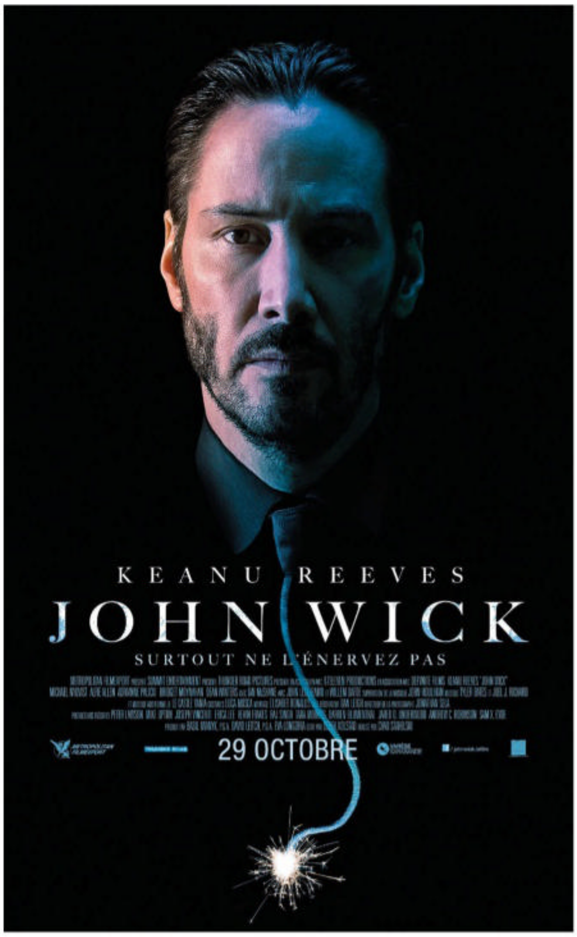
JOHN WICK

JOHN WICK, 2014

Reeves plays a former hitman for the Russian mob who leaves retirement to get revenge in 2014's action thriller *John Wick*.

CHAPTER 11

LOST LOVE
Bridget Moynahan (as John Wick's wife, Helen, below, left) and Keanu Reeves share a scene in *John Wick*.



The Part: John Wick was working for a Russian organized crime syndicate as a hitman when he met Helen (Bridget Moynahan), the love of his life. She convinced him to retire, but when he approached his boss, Viggo Tarasov (Michael Nyqvist) about the idea, Viggo said he'd grant his request if he completed an "impossible task" and killed all his enemies in a single night.

Wick, remarkably, killed them all. He then married Helen and began his life in retirement. Five years later, Helen dies of cancer. She leaves her husband a puppy named Daisy and a letter urging him to find peace in his life.

His peace—and his retirement—don't last. He has an encounter with Iosef Tarasov (Alfie Allen), the son of his old mob boss, who wants to buy Wick's car. When Wick says no, Tarasov grows angry and plots his revenge. That night, he and his gang break into Wick's home, beat him up, steal his car and kill Daisy.

This sends Wick into a rage and back into the underworld as he begins to seek revenge of his own on Tarasov and his mob.

Legendary Line: "When Helen died, I lost everything. Until that dog arrived on my doorstep..."

MOVING ON
Helen leaves John a beagle puppy named Daisy to help him grieve after her death from cancer. But Daisy is killed by Iosef Tarasov (Alfie Allen, below, left), leading Wick to seek revenge.

Behind the Scenes: The part of John Wick wasn't written with Keanu Reeves in mind. The screenwriter, Derek Kolstad, said he envisioned Paul Newman playing the role. But Newman had already died by the time Kolstad was writing the script.

As a result, Wick was supposed to be a man in his mid-60s. But when Thunder Road Pictures and producer Basil Iwanyk acquired the film, they decided to go in another direction.

"We decided to look for someone who is not literally older, but who has a seasoned history in the film world," Iwanyk told film critic Emmanuel Levy. "Keanu Reeves is someone I've always wanted to work with."

Reeves was actually brought on not just as the star, but as a collaborator. And in the hopes of making the action sequences as real as possible, he reached out to Chad Stahelski and David Leitch, who had worked with him as stunt coordinators and stuntmen on *The Matrix* films. Stahelski was Reeves' stunt double for those movies. The actor hoped to use their stunt group, 87Eleven, to design and film the action sequences, though he said he actually wanted them for a bigger role.

"When I got *John Wick*, I sent it to them originally for the action part of the film, but secretly hoping that they'd want to direct it," Reeves told *The Hollywood Reporter*. "And then they did."

It became the directing debut for Stahelski and Leitch. And though they had worked with Reeves before, the action sequences they needed him to do for this film were different than what they had him do for *The Matrix*. Reeves needed to learn Judo, Japanese jiu-jitsu and Brazilian jiu-jitsu. He also needed military-style gun training.

"No one just learns on the day," Stahelski told Collider.com. "Keanu spent four months with

the gun coaches and our tactical people from L.A. SWAT and our Navy SEAL friends."

Reeves became so good at it all that he ended up doing 90% of his own stunts during filming. And he was so central to the production that he even influenced the name of the film. It was originally called *Scorn*. But Reeves liked the name John Wick—named for Kolstad's grandfather—so much he kept telling people he was going to be in a film called *John Wick*. Eventually the name stuck.

Incredibly, *John Wick* is roughly based on a true story. In 2009, a former Navy SEAL named Marcus Luttrell, who had been the lone survivor of a famous battle with the Taliban in Afghanistan (as portrayed in the film *Lone Survivor*) heard a gunshot outside his Texas home. When he went to investigate, Luttrell found his yellow Labrador puppy dead. The dog had been given to him to help deal with the trauma he experienced in the war, and he had named it DASY—an acronym with each letter representing a fellow SEAL who'd been killed.

"When I saw she was dead," he told the *Houston Chronicle*, "the only thing that popped into my head was, 'I've got to take these guys out.'"

Luttrell did catch the killers, but instead of a John Wick-like revenge rampage, he called the police and had them arrested.

REAL-LIFE WICK
The character John Wick is roughly based on Marcus Luttrell (left), a Navy SEAL who was the lone survivor in a battle with the Taliban in Afghanistan.

STUNT MAN
Reeves (right) performed 90% of his own stunts and learned Judo and Japanese and Brazilian jiu-jitsu. He also required military-style gun training for his role.

KEANU REEVES

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